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The Voyage Home

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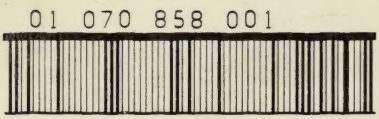




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The second part of the story of
Mary Hervey (born Hansyke),
first made plain in *The Lovely
Ship*.

In this book none of the characters represent real people, living or dead. They are wholly imaginary. The geography of the book is not without imaginary elements, and the shipbuilding firm incidentally described makes no attempt at following the history of any firm on the Tees or of any one shipbuilding town.

For

My Mother

CHAPTER ONE

MARY HERVEY believed that she was living in the greatest of all ages. She saw it as solid, magnificent, fixed: its violent contrasts and colours blended for her into one rich composite picture. That picture needs no description. The decade that begins in the middle 'eighties is so close to us that we hear its authentic voice, catch with hardly an effort a laugh, a rustle of silk, a glimpse of white shoulders, the echo of crowds cheering a royal Jubilee, a bugle note, snatches of song; and so remote that only with difficulty do we see through the lineaments—harsh and romantic, grasping and generous, active piety staring down active scepticism—to the spirit behind. Do we, after all, get behind? The contrasts are so violent; they distract us. Mary Hervey's new house was completed in the year that men working in her dockyards paid themselves off at four o'clock, too exhausted—most of them had had no food since the day before—to do another hand's turn, for their most desperate need.

It was the decade when the great trading families, the successors or survivors of the first heirs of industrial revolution, consolidated their magnificence. Dinners were later and more elaborate. More and more furniture, solid and costly, heavier curtains, vaster candelabra, were crowded into their rooms, and the doors shut—on disturbing thoughts, on raffishness, on change itself. The men and women in those splendid rooms neither expected nor desired change. Civilisation had reached an apex; they had comfort, security, splendour—what could they want, except that it should be always noon? The promise of the century's spring and early summer flowered into a luxuriance in which there was hardly a touch—the faintest thinning of the air—of autumn.

How close can we come to Mary Hervey, standing—it is a spring morning of 1886—on the terrace of her new house? Close enough to see the rose under the clear skin—forty-four years have marked her very little—the straightness of her narrow back, the thick dark hair, still uncovered, for Mary Hervey never took to a cap. But close enough to feel the secret stirring of a pulse, to follow the thought behind the eyes? Less than half a century divides us, and yet how baffling she is. Her mind was equivocal and simple; it is amazing how few things she saw that were under her very eyes—she watched the weary, shuffling men leaving her foundry, but her thought never followed one of them home to his room in a squalid street, or saw him seated sullenly in a chair and his wife stooping to his clumsy boots—and how instantly her imagination leaped to the ends of the earth; she entered with her ships harbours she had never seen, came ashore on strange quays, lived in foreign ports, chaffered in foreign tongues. She was hard; she tyrannised over her daughters; and yet she was generous, she was humble, yielding, secretly shy.

What were her thoughts in that moment when she stood, smiling, her hand half-way to her cheek? She had halted between the lawn and the great door opening on the terrace. Her glance took in the bright green of grass at her feet, the profound dazzling whiteness of the clouds bounding from the horizon, and the infinite gradations of colour in the cloud of blossom in her orchards. A leaf on a tree close to her unfolded as she watched, slowly, delicately, offering itself to the air: listening attentively, she could hear the sound of water sliding over stones, and a scuffle of birds in the orchard. A familiar anguish invaded her happiness. If life would only stand still. If spring could renew itself forever while she watched. She felt now each year, with a more singular sharpness, the contrast between its recurring miracle and her shortening life. To lose it—not to hear, not to see,

not to feel—that was terrible, unbearable. Unconsciously, she had begun to store her mind with sounds and sights, unnoticed in earlier years ; the first singing of birds, the shapes of hills, the quality of light in the moments between dusk and darkness. She was like an unwilling traveller who watches his country receding from him and strains his eyes to see the roofs of houses, fields folding into each other, the violet shadows on the sides of the hills, the short turf, the brightness of waves falling on the shore, until at last he is homeless.

She turned and went with quick steps into the house. A few moments later she was driving towards Middlesbrough, alone and upright in the substantial old carriage. The drive took an hour and a half, and though for the last half of it she was never out of sight of the town, she rarely saw it—squalid, conceived overnight in the ugly haste of industrial opportunity, without a single gracious or redeeming line. Iron works and furnaces faced it across the bleak estuary of the Tees, grey slag tips, squat sheds, monstrous gas retorts, cylinders, tall black shafts. The hissing uprush of steam cut through a plexus of other noises.

Six years earlier she had sold the old Garton shipyard and moved—from the quiet waters of the little Danesacre harbour—north round that harsh coast to the Tees. She grieved bitterly : but there was no help for it. The age had moved past the little town ; its harbour was too small and sand-locked, its wharves narrow and old : there was no iron. Garton's must build where Garton boats could be engined by her own works. As she turned her back on Danesacre, her youth touched her on the shoulder: she looked steadily and long at Mark Henry Garton's house leaning to the little shipyard, at the lovely fold of the hills. Did she see them ? Or was it a short serious little girl who came, with precise steps, across the yard to meet her ? If it was, they looked for a moment together at the sun on the water and a ship, sails furled, lying in

mid-harbour, before Mary Hervey turned and went away. Whatever her thoughts were, she kept them to herself.

A number of Danesacre families followed her to the Tees, and found new homes in the streets huddled round the Garton docks and works. This seemed to Mary a very satisfactory state of affairs : it never occurred to her that they were worse off than they had been in the wind-swept ghauts and yards of Danesacre. She went out of her way to see that they were the last to suffer when times were hard and work short. Times were hard now. The streets through which she was driving to the offices of the *Garton Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering Works* were in the grip of acute privation. It was nothing out of the way, and Garton's—Mary was used in these monstrous vicissitudes—was hardly embarrassed. There had been a boom, during which her yards could not build fast enough—and then, suddenly, it was over. Yards closed down, ships were laid up, and whole streets of families starved and suffered. There were children in the grime-eroded houses she was passing, but they might all have been dead for any sound they made. Even the two playing languidly in the gutter were silent, scarcely moving their limbs out of the way of the wheels. Mary had opened a soup kitchen, which her daughters attended faithfully : perhaps soup every other day is little comforting to small hungry stomachs—but she had done what she could. Hard times—the swing of the great pendulum —were an axiom, of which pallid children are only one, and an incurious, proof.

She was thinking of John Mempes, for whose sake, and because he would not resign, she had refrained from selling the Garton Line. She ought to sell : it was a burden and an excrescence on the reconstructed Works ; but she hesitated and delayed. It was one of the few times in her life when she allowed sentiment to weigh with her. And yet, was it sentiment ? An obscure instinct

warned her that in getting rid of Mempes she would seal the last channel by which her life fled back to the hills where it rose. There was little sentiment—he had once asked young Mary Roxby to marry him—in their association. They fought each other grimly, locked in a struggle that Mempes could end by dying or resigning. He did neither. He managed the Line as if it were his own property ; and he survived, suffering agonies of gout, into an age he detested for its gross self-love, its piety, and above all, its portentous gravity.

He was far from detesting Mary Hervey ; but he had no illusions : he understood her, or thought he did. Yet she was continually surprising him. Her insensitiveness was astonishing, but so were her energy, her courage, and her will. Her will had defeated his at every turn but one : she met his adroitness with direct strokes, and his directness with the twistings of a mind so tortuous that he gave her up in despair. Yet she was not tortuous, and her intellect—not a tenth as supple as his—was limited in all directions but one. No matter—he had not been able to do anything with her ; partly, no doubt, because of the curious indolence that distilled itself at the heart of his subtle and contradictory nature. He delayed, he put off, he compromised ; and when, exasperated, Mary did the one thing he had hoped by his tactics to prevent, he seemed unmoved ; as if nothing was worth the fatigue of getting it. To an onlooker, their relations were inexplicable. She never took his advice, but she sometimes asked for it. The weft of her mind was shot through with a strange and touching humility. In the heart of a violent quarrel he would find himself faced by a friendly honest little girl, whose admiration and affection for him sparkled in her eyes. And then he gave in, and for a time all went smoothly—until she slipped him, and was away on some fantastic project in which a grimly ageing Mempes could see neither sense nor safety. . . . She ran, he thought, straighter now. The erratic

strain she had from Mark Henry Garton—Mark Henry had been grossly coarse as well as erratic—showed less in her. John Mempes, racked with gout and debts, drew what comfort he could from it.

He was standing, when Mary came in, by the window in her room. She gave him her hand and looked quickly at him.

" Ought you to be here, John ? "

" I told that damned apothecary he could either get me up or go about his business," he said airily.

She sat down, and he lowered himself into a chair near her table. " I'm going to put a boat in hand for Garton's," she said at once. He reminded her that half the boats were laid off. " I know, I know," she said impatiently. " But—the children in the dock quarter are too hungry to cry."

He was astounded. He had driven with her through that quarter a dozen times in the past month, and she had stared at her coachman's back, unseeing and unhearing. She was mad : he braced himself, though he cared very little about it now, to make her behave.

" You can't afford it, Mary. Freights will go lower yet. The Board won't agree."

" The Board ! " She dismissed her fellow-directors lightly. " I'll build you a good boat," she said persuasively.

" I know you," he said grimly. " She'll fit twin screws and two sets of triple-expansion engines. You'll have some notion of forced draught or steel castings you want to give a trial. I wonder how long before you're signing on steel crews in the room of flesh and blood."

" Dear John." She was laughing at him. " Not in your lifetime."

His life was the life of the Line, he knew. She'd sell the day he died. Well, he had beaten her there : the only time he had ever got the better of her in all their long antagonism.

Surely they *were* antagonists ?—the memory of a young laughing face came very close : it hurt him a little. Suddenly, he felt very tired. What use was it to hang on like this, a pensioner of her one weakness ? Better drop off while he lived, decently and in order ; retire to his sister's uncomfortable country house and in due course die there, in the aroma of her piety. If he had had any money—but he had never known how to save—and he had responsibilities, though none he could acknowledge to that holy woman. He became aware that Mary had spoken to him twice—no doubt she thought his mind was beginning to wander—and getting painfully out of his chair, he said : " One of the captains—Russell, it was—saw that fellow Hardman in Civita Vecchia on his last trip. He looked—yellow." He watched her closely to see how she took it.

" I hadn't heard."

Was she still in love with the fellow ? She had an obstinate memory, but it was six years since Hardman had run away from her, instead of with her. He could read nothing in the delicate irony of her gaze, and impatient of the gentleness and consideration with which she treated him, now that he was too old and ill to deal with her, he took himself off, inattentive to the last. She ran after him to the door to remind him of Richard's party.

She left the office early. The last moments of her drive offered an admirable view of her new house. Built, of that cold northern stone which has no sun in it, on the slope of the Clevelands, it embodied every modern quality she admired. Undoubtedly she had had a model before her eyes when she stood over her architect, alternately bullying and coaxing the unfortunate man. His task would have been easier if she could have brought herself to be frank with him ; but he did succeed in achieving a curious dual likeness to the two grim old houses at the other side of the moor : Roxby House, where her son had been born and her first husband had died, and Hansyke

Manor. Yet her age had its way : and the splendours of the new house were Garton splendours—a solid comfortable magnificence far removed from the austere inconvenience of Roxbys and Hansykes. There were no draughts in it, and though she spent on it lavishly she saw to it that she got her money's worth.

She stopped the carriage before it reached the house, and set out across the park, her dress gathered round her. Her estate took in three considerable woods, laced with innumerable small streams running from the moor to the valley, and slopes of fine springy turf, starred with pale cuckoo flowers and the short sturdy orchises she loved better than all other flowers, for their little air of gallantry and fresh pure colours.

She leaned idly against a young tree, her head pressed back against the yielding stem, so that the sun fell on her face. A curious indecision pressed on her mind. She speculated ironically on Mempes' power to disturb her. He thought so little of what she had done : she might almost, in his eyes, have been a failure. She smiled a little, eyes and lips lending themselves delicately to a conspiracy of surprise. How romantic John was ! His elegance (his clothes were cut in the fashions of thirty years ago), his ill-timed jests, his scepticism, alarmed her contemporaries : they distrusted him profoundly ; he was a cynic and an atheist, their terms of bitterest dislike. Mary despised public opinion : no doubt John was cynical, but—she smiled, indulgently. His cynicisms, she said, rolled off her. It was true. Her candour—the honesty and directness which prevailed over her own attempts at diplomacy—gave them no foothold. She was still, almost unchanged, the simple conscientious girl, whose single purpose, unfalteringly pursued, had been to make herself the only person to whom Mark Henry Garton could leave his ships. She had never, but in one dreadful instance, failed in her trust. For that lapse, she would answer to her Maker, and to Mark Henry

himself : before then, she would one day answer for it to herself.

She trembled a little. *Civita Vecchia and looked ill.* Six years ago, she had been ready to throw away everything, her ships (Mark Henry's ships), even her son. Why—unless an instinct had warned her that all she had was less valuable than what she had not? Passion? She moved her thin shoulders impatiently : there had been less passion than pity in her love for Gerry Hardman. A bitter curious pity it had been, a triple agony of spirit, nerves, and body. Yet she had been happy, with a serene radiant happiness, as at no other time in her life. And—as at no other time in her life—had chosen against the Garton in her.

" I must go," she said aloud, and stayed. The minutes slipped away, and still she stood, in the attitude of a careless watcher. What sounds visited her, louder than the sliding water? what ghosts, with the indescribable gentleness of dead selves? A wife, learning, clumsily and in anguish, the differences between men's love and women's ; a bride, shy and adoring ; a young girl, frowning under Mark Henry Garton's sardonic eye over the unknown queerness of a bill of lading ; a girl-mother, playing with her baby on the lawns of Roxby House?

If Archie Roxby had not died—if Mark Henry had refused to take her into the firm—if she had given in when Hugh begged her to sell out and stay with him in London—she flung out her hands. " I did what I had to," she told John Mempes. " Say I chose—how other, at any of those moments, could I have chosen? " There were ghosts she let pitifully alone : her mother, reckless, wasted, extravagant Charlotte Hansyke ; who could say how often, obscurely, she had been swayed in her decisions by the memory of that poor, turbulent life?

How long had she stood there, loitering with ghosts? Her feet had pressed out small pools in the yielding moss. She set off in guilty haste, and taking a short way over

streams and up hill-sides, reached the edge of the lawn as her son came out of the house in search of her.

Mary was fond of her daughters ; but she cared for neither of them as she did for Richard. She kept up a pretence of equality in her attitude to her children, and it deceived no one. Sometimes she was very sharp with him, and then he took himself off to Roxby House, a few rooms of which had been put in order for him, and a married bailiff installed, when he came of age. Mary pretended not to notice that he had gone ; after a few days she became uneasy, trotting about her house in a fever of suppressed impatience. He might have fallen from his horse : he might be ill, in the great empty house : that woman was a fool ; she would neglect him, he would die. After this, it was pure chance whether she sent to Roxby for him or he returned before her message got there. He knew the precise moment to come back ; he could have avoided her swift rare angers, if he had not been at once too lazy and too like her to do it.

She was proud of him. He was a very attractive young man, tall and clean-shaven (a Roxby tradition), with dark hair, and a notable charm of manner. He had a quick vivid mind, receptive and subtle : it absorbed facts swiftly and delighted in the mechanical difficulties of construction. He worked with enormous energy ; rode, and danced, with the same headlong ease : but there were mysterious times when he found he could do nothing at all ; he rode idly over the moor to Roxby House and back, read Dryden and Donne, and dreamed. When his mother scolded him he sat smiling at her until she gave him up, comically baffled ; secretly she was a little proud of his queerness. He was not just like other young men. In his twenty-fifth year she put him on the Board, after a frightful scene with William Adam Todd ; the savage old man accused her of dishonesty, of intriguing against him, and all but died, of rage and spite, at the other side of the table. She watched him coldly while he choked

and dragged at his collar, and Richard came on the Board, as she had always meant him to do.

She was afraid to admit, even to herself, how much she thought of him. He was too nearly perfect. She was afraid of God—not Miss Flora's gentle Saviour, but the grim First Person of the Trinity. He had an account against her ; no mere vague human sinfulness, which she might contrive to balance by doing her duty : but a particular account. She had never yet paid for the pleasure of loving Gerry Hardman : her tears, the anguish she felt when he left her, all that—though at the time it had seemed a fair price to pay for the happiness she had had, great happiness and great sorrow—was not enough. She had got over it, as, since life is just bearable, we get over everything, and the account was still not paid. It was no small account, and she had always in her heart the thought that He might punish her through Richard : in her utter folly had she not been willing to take Gerry at the cost of never seeing her son again ? It would be like Him to balance the account with her own figures.

She put up no petitions, in words, offered Him none of those piteous bargains which, if they were accepted, would make every mother a hostage for her son : unconsciously, she felt that to be below the dignity of both of them. One night she went into Richard's room, as she had done when he was still a little boy to make sure that he was safe and persuade him, asleep and protesting, to lie straight in bed. The young man slept in the huddled posture of the child, his face hidden in his arm. Mary hung over him, her body heavy with its mysterious happiness ; she was afraid to think about it.

He teased her unconscionably. She had but a poor sense of humour, and when she saw through him she ruffled like an angry bird. He laughed with delight and mischief, an arm round her shoulder, and his young merry face close to hers. She tried not to smile at him,

filled with absurd delicious pride. She was very angry—he had behaved shamefully—why wasn't he ashamed? She was like a young girl with him, laughing and quarrelling in a breath. It always ended in the same way, she facing him squarely, her little body pushed forward like a defiant boy's. "Enough of that, son," she would say, and begin to talk to him gravely. He rode recklessly, she had been told of his follies by John Mempes; he worked too hard and irregularly, he was erratic, he would kill himself—one way or another, he would certainly kill himself. Would he promise her to take more care? He promised; she sighed, smiled, and turned away.

She wanted him to marry: he was twenty-eight, nearly twenty-nine; high time he settled down. But none of the young women she knew, daughters of Tees-side shipbuilders and ironmasters, was good enough for him. He liked them, danced with them in the big ugly houses drawing their riches from the black estuary; he did not know how attractive he was, nor that he smiled at every woman as if he loved her. His mother knew. She fastened his tie before the dances, with a great air of condescension—he did it better himself—and looked him over with bright quick eyes. "Have a good time, my son."

"They don't dance nearly so well as you do," Richard said. He smiled at her. "They bounce."

Mary was secretly delighted, but she would not show it. "Nonsense," she said sharply. "Get along with you. I'm an old woman."

"You're prettier than any of them," he teased her. She pretended not to know that he meant it, that she was more to him than any of the bouncing young women he took in his arms. She never asked him how he had enjoyed himself. In that way she made certain of being told. Young women who were in love with Richard made candid advances to her; she enjoyed it all grimly,

and was very civil. One evening a girl saw a meditative smile on Mrs. Hervey's mouth—and became certain that Richard's mother knew more than any young woman about her son.

This winter she had sent him up to London for the season. He had never stayed there, though his closest friend was now in the Foreign Office, and his step-father's sister—she had made, surprising Mary, a remarkably good marriage—asked him every year to stay in the house in Berkeley Square. The London he saw intoxicated him: Piccadilly, crowded with hansom cabs; his step-father's club in St. James's, where old gentlemen took kindly to the respectful young man and told him fascinating interminable stories that began: "I recollect, sir, when——" and transported Richard into another, curiously more polite and licentious world; the Opera, very formal, magnificent, and dazzling; a ball at Spencer House, which he remembered because the same day a mob of starving men smashed the windows of some shops in Piccadilly and had to be beaten off by the police; the ballet, dinners, dances, music, more music, Strauss and Schubert; the indefinable bouquet of the narrow streets between Piccadilly and Pall Mall, sweat of smartly driven horses, smells of old leather, wine lees, and cheese, mingled with a waft of scent from the buttonhole in a man's overcoat. Fastidious and inexpert, he never stepped outside the circle of a small leisured elegant society, the last fine flower of an age and a world of which no trace now remains; sunk in a light silt of memories, it is already as old as buried Carthage, and quite fallen out of the hands of time.

On the last night of his visit he met his Roxby cousins, the grandchildren of that John Roxby, his father's youngest brother, whom Mary had never seen: they had quarrelled civilly by letter over the Roxby estate until he died. As soon as he came home, he asked his mother to invite the girl and her brother to stay. The boy was charming, he

said, a serious young soldier, fresh from the Shop. He told her less about Cynthia, and afraid to question him, she sat down to write to her unknown niece. Cynthia Roxby's reply was entirely charming, but Mary felt that the girl did not want to come : she was that moment leaving for Rome ; might she come later ? in May ? Mary—Richard's unspoken wishes driving her—wrote to settle the day. . . . .

She knew, as Richard walked across the grass to meet her, that she was very late. Cynthia and Nicholas had arrived : the vision she had had, of herself waiting in formal splendour for John Roxby's grandchildren, vanished. Instead, she met Richard's reproachful gaze.

" You forgot all about me," he said, " and your guests, and my party. You're a wicked woman—a bad mother."

Mary stood still, in dismay. " Richard ! " she gasped. She looked at him again. He was laughing at her, his eyes dancing with amusement.

" Where are they ? " she whispered furiously. " Let me go, Richie. I won't come in on them like this." He kept his arm firmly round her, and she entered her house, and the drawing-room where they were waiting for her, a rose in either cheek, and her eyes sparkling. She was very angry, but the smile with which she greeted Cynthia Roxby surprised the girl : it was gay and strangely triumphant. Mary had suddenly remembered her dreadful struggle with Charles and James Roxby when she was young and poor. They were dead, and she was alive, and she had defeated them all.

She saw that Cynthia Roxby was a beauty. The girl had a quantity of bright fair hair, dressed low on her neck : her skin was exquisite and her eyes wide and lovely. She was thin, but she held herself well, and moved gracefully. She had a sweet rounded voice. Mary looked at her son. He's really in love with her, she thought. I can bear it if he's happy. She did not doubt that Cynthia would have him—he was a good match for her,

since very little of John Roxby's money had outlived him —but she wanted the girl to show a fitting sense of her good fortune.

She shook hands with Nicholas Roxby, liking him at once : he had none of his sister's looks, but a square kind boyish face and a head of dark hair. He smiled charmingly. Sylvia came across the room and stooped her sleek head to whisper in her mother's ear ; she wanted to say that Clara had one of her sick headaches : her dress brushed against him ; he turned scarlet, and stammered something the young girl did not hear. She looked at him with a dazzling smile, and waited a moment, but he could not speak.

Mary took all this in before she left them and went up to Clara's room. Never ill, she had little sympathy with Clara's headaches ; she almost felt that they were part of the girl's clumsiness. Clara had been an awkward clumsy child, and she was an awkward shy girl. She suffered agonies from her mother's silent criticisms. She declared now that she felt better. She would get up : not for the world would she miss Richard's party. Her mother's cool fingers pressed her forehead.

" Get up if you want to, my dear," she said kindly.

From the windows of her own room, she saw her husband riding across the park. He disappeared behind the trees. Five minutes later she heard the sounds of his arrival ; she hoped he would look for her before he dressed. Almost every day he did come to her, as soon as he got into the house, his eyes very bright, his slight body a little stooped and tired. He rode hard, and he persisted in riding horses that were too big and powerful for his weight. She had taken to giving him an egg in a glass of his best sherry before dinner: both, and an old glass with the Hansyke crest and a twisted stem, were put ready for her on her writing-table. Hugh had protested, but he had given in.

She smiled lightly. She had never liked Hugh better

than she did now ; he was infinitely kind to her, and thoughtful—the most charming companion in the world. She admired him, and liked to be seen with him: he carried his thin body with a distinguished and faintly rakish air: she had never become used to it, nor to the quickness of his mind, after which hers toiled stolidly, always a thought behind. A disturbing memory touched her. It must be more than twenty years since young Mary Roxby fell into so imperious a passion for him, married him, and disappointed him: and how long after that ?—not long—when the break came. Mary moved restlessly. Why to-day, of all days, should these memories invade her mind, tattered companies in which no fife played ? Perhaps the spring, its sharp scents stealing into every corner of the house, with the sound of running streams and the full flood of bird song : perhaps John Mempes' fine old fingers, probing in his sardonic way, had found and widened some crack in her defences. She sighed. The thought struck her that when Mempes died she would be almost the only person left alive who remembered Mark Henry Garton : the echo of his gross jolly laughter was fading from the world. There were no such men now. "I'm old," she said aloud, and thought instantly : But I feel young. She thought that her strength was inexhaustible ; she was as tough as Mark Henry. Like him, she would die old, and still strong. The years that had brought her ecstasy, suffering—the multitude of tiny strokes, each as soft and delicate as a loving finger and as relentless as dissolution, that make up a life—had not brought her weariness or defeat. And yet, she had been defeated, time and again. Hugh had defeated her, leaving her for Fanny Jardine. The effect on her spirit of that bitter circumstance, a sharp stroke across her youth and pride, was profound. It persisted. Even now, when she had had and lost a lover, after years of tranquil friendship with Hugh, it pricked her, a little, when she remembered it.

Hugh came into the room: he dropped into a chair and watched her measure out his sherry. He made a faint grimace—"I wish you wouldn't look after me, Mary," he said testily—but on the whole he liked the mixture; when he drank it the egg broke voluptuously in his throat, and he felt better afterwards. But that was the sherry.

Mary met his glance with a twinkling eye. "Did you forget that there was a Board meeting this morning, Hugh?"

Hugh sat up with violent suddenness. "I did. God help me, what a fool I am. . . . I don't suppose you missed me."

Mary laughed. "William Adam Todd did not. I did. You have a better head than any of us." Hugh glanced at her sharply. She meant it, he thought curiously, and he swallowed his comment.

She did mean it. In the last six years, since at a critical moment he made the suggestion that saved Garton's from foundering in the trough of a wave, she had relied on him more and more. It was a queer position: Hugh Hervey, the subtle scholarly historian of the fourteenth century, one time Master of the Cleveland Hounds, owner and breeder of hunting stock of the first class, had been drawn deeper and deeper into the problems of Garton's. He knew nothing about the building of ships; he disliked, with an astonishing bitterness, the mechanism of industry, he saw it as wasteful and bloody, a perpetual war in which the victims were women and children, the weak and the maimed; he would have preferred to live out his life between his study and his stable. He sat instead hour after hour in Mary's room—reading—listening—offering his quick intuitive comments: his thoughts darted backwards and forwards, back into the past when Mary was young and he her loving, loved husband; forward into the years when he would be old, his life finished, his words unsaid, his desires withered in him: they came to rest quiveringly in the present,

as a leaf falls into a swiftly running stream, on the still figure of his wife, on the flames of the candles reflected in the black depths of her desk : his eye followed them, gleaming, refracted, like sunlight flashing on black bog-water : he made an irrelevant remark, and in the silence after his voice ceased he saw through the open window the remote immensity of the sky, awash with ghostly clouds, and harrowed by the keels of the stars.

Mary was talking. "The young Roxbys came. I was out."

"What's the girl like ? "

"A beauty." Mary sighed. "You must go and dress, Hugh. It's incredibly late." She stood looking down at him. "You're so tired, my dear." He disliked being indulged or pitied by her : to avert it now, he told her hastily what he had meant to keep to himself.

"One of the men found a woman dead, of starvation, in her room to-day. She and her two children lodged with him and his wife. Last night they heard the boy say over and over again : 'Can't ye find *anything* for me, mammy ? ' They had nothing themselves, to give her. This morning the children cried so persistently that they went in and found her dead, sitting in her chair, with the two of them climbing about her. Her husband set off a week ago to walk to Liverpool ; he'd been told he might get work there. . . . I saw to the children, for the time being." He stopped abruptly.

Mary had turned pale. "Was he one of Garton's men ! "

"No. Off one of the other yards."

"You're—hating me for it," Mary said. "Oh, the poor woman. The poor woman."

Hugh looked at her. "It's not your fault. It's everyone's." He knew that what shocked her was the inexorable end : there was nothing she could do, no appeasement against death. He wanted to say to her : "You're on the wrong scent, my dear. The woman's

death is nothing; the actual moment of dissolution—nothing." His mind would not let him off the living woman, and the count of days leading to that hour when nothing remained to her but the child's voice asking, over and over: "Haven't ye *anything* for me, mammy?" she could hear him but she could do nothing: the darkness thickened round her before the night came: did she realise that her lethargy was death? it grew darker and even colder; the child's voice came from a long way off now: but it was the last voice she heard, the last of all human sounds; something touched her face—a hand?—she could not lift her own to it; then, nothing.

Hugh stood up sharply. "Don't think about it. It's a devilishly managed world." He pulled a letter out of his pocket. "I saw young Russell when I called at the office this afternoon. He gave me this for you. It was brought just after you'd left by a person who said it must be sent after you by messenger. Russell didn't think much of the bearer, and he was going to leave it until the morning. I said I'd take it."

He went away, leaving a shabby envelope in her hand. She opened it without interest. "Susan Putt," she read, "humbly recalls herself to Mrs. Hervey. You was Mrs. Roxby when you knew me. I am in great need. I should not trouble you for long, if you would help me. I remember you as kind." That, with the address, was all.

Susan Putt came readily enough from a remote past. Mary Hervey sat in front of her glass, and saw a girl in heavy black running along the stone passages of Roxby House: Archie Roxby had been buried, but the house was still wearied with his fantastic brothers; lean, spiteful Charles, whispering in her ear; James taking her aside to consult her about a marriage project: it involved getting rid of an unlegalised Mrs. James—Susan Putt. Mary frowned: another moment and she would be able to catch his very accents. Ah!—she had it now: "Susan

has lived with me for twenty-five years . . . she has never had any other association ; with my help and example she has refined herself to such a . . ." The thin, pompous voice trailed away into the past : Mary could not hear the rest of it. He had dismissed Susan : but he had not married ; he had died of age and port in Roxby House just before her second marriage, and after an interview in which he had tried to get money out of her. He had trembled with rage. Her refusal probably finished him.

She put the letter in her desk : to-morrow would be time enough for Susan Putt. She was dressed when Hugh came back in a hurry, to tell her that a Captain Rupert Ling—a master's courtesy title, it was—had marched up to him in the club and announced himself as her cousin. " I told him to come to-night," Hugh said ; he eyed her doubtfully. " I thought he'd be less of a trial to you in a large party, if you dislike him. You spoke of him once as if you did."

" I disliked him very much when he was a boy," Mary said dreamily, " and when he was a young man. He's not my cousin. Mark Henry Garton's father married twice ; and his second wife was a Mrs. Maria Ling, a widow with one boy. John Ling married a cousin—Lings marry each other, they're not liked outside their own sort. He and his wife were drowned at sea, and Mark Henry took his two sons. Everyone thought he would leave them his ships : *they* thought so, and when he died, and the ships were mine, Rupert Ling took himself off at once. I liked him better then . . . I haven't seen him for fifteen years. It's all right—your inviting him is all right."

She left him sitting in her room and went upstairs, to the third floor, where a panelled corridor ran the length of the house. Miss Flora had a room at the far end of it, with a rounded window that looked across the gardens to the edge of the moor. She had thought herself an old

woman when Charlotte Hansyke took her—with hardly a glance at the bundle of recommendations offered tremblingly to her gaze—from her last employer and sent her to Hansyke Manor, to impart to Mary such brightly coloured scraps of information as she herself had gleaned, from a *Child's Guide to Knowledge* and a few books carefully guarded in thick paper. She was very old now—eighty-six. The frailer she grew, the more certain she was of imminent happiness. It was as if her body, which had suffered so many humiliations and hungers, wept so many times, were splitting like a dry husk to discover a thin bright streak of spiritual arrogance. People came in and out of her room, Sylvia in one of her tempers, Clara, to laugh at her own awkwardness—and went away soothed, but not by anything she said. She did not want to talk to them. Her thoughts were hardly clear enough ; they slipped easily into dreams in which she saw herself walking in a garden, with a little girl holding her hand. She was not sure who the little girl was—there had been so many of them—and sometimes it seemed as if the timid child were herself, and her mother, in a gown the colour of some bright flower, beckoned to her from the steps of a house. She woke with a start, to find herself still looking through the window of her room : and now she was very happy, because the scene changed easily to the likeness of an engraving in Hansyke Manor :- the garden below her was filled with a clear subtle light, and in the middle distance she could make out the walls of the heavenly city, under a soft dazzling sky. She might almost be *There*, without the faint pang that divided the moment in which she was sitting in this pleasant room from the next —in which she would be free, dismissed into peace.

When Mary came into the room, she remembered guiltily that she ought to have been dressing for Richard's party. She had made a remarkable discovery about time, which she could not share with anyone. It went on outside her with the old inexorability, but inside, in

her body, it was suspended ; and the sunny moment in which she advanced a step or two towards that kind beckoning figure turned out to have lasted five hours. It was very confusing, and she had long since given up trying to distinguish between one kind of time and the other, but certain bright specks remained, fixed and indubitably real. Mary was one, and another was her plum-coloured silk. She would put it on now, before she forgot again, eat her dinner quietly alone, and come down then.

" Rupert Ling is coming to the party," Mary said. " Do you remember when he locked a great dog in your cupboard to frighten me ? He was a hateful boy."

Miss Flora shook her head. " I don't recall him," she said mildly. " So many boys are hateful . . . Richard was always kind and well-mannered." When Mary had gone, a vague memory of Rupert Ling, mixed with terrifying memories of Mark Henry Garton, stirred in her mind. She tried to imagine Mark Henry as a translated spirit—but that was too much, and the thought of meeting him again *There* troubled her profoundly.

In another bedroom on the same floor, Nicholas Roxby was struggling with his tie. He had spoiled the first when his sister poked her head round the door, and followed it by her slender body in ivory satin.

" Nicholas ! You're not ready."

" I can't fasten this thing," he said agitatedly.

She took hold of the ends, her laughing face close to his. " How old are you, Nicky ? "

" Eighteen."

" Then you ought to know how to do this sort of thing now. There." She stepped back, and he got a clear look at her. Her dress was cut round and very low, showing the slope of her shoulders ; their whiteness made him blink, and he was certain, with a sinking of the heart, that no other girl at the party would appear so recklessly *décolletée.*

" You've grown very fine since you've lived with my Aunt Sil," he ventured.

" You don't like it ? "

" It's—bold."

" Bold ! Oh Nicky ! " She laughed delightedly. " I'm not a girl. I'm twenty-four, and I know the world. If you'd seen what we chose it from, in Paris. You're so solemn, and I'm afraid you're pious. I thought the army would have broken you of that. Do you and my mother still pray together on your birthday ? You're scarlet. I believe you do." She laughed, and shook her bright head, her eyes sparkling with mirth, and the knowledge that she would be a sensation. She was so radiant that his heart warmed to her.

" Well, you're very beautiful," he said stoutly. " You'll knock 'em all, my dear." He thought of Sylvia, and his boy's voice slurred over the words.

Cynthia slipped her arm in his, and drew him out of the room towards the stairs. " These Herveys are as rich as nabobs, and they know it. Richard is a catch up here, and *he* knows it. They made it all in shipbuilding : they're only tradesmen : *she* despises the Roxbys, though Richard is one. There'll be no one here to-night but the wives and daughters of ironmasters, shipbuilders, and company men, with a sprinkling of real people from the Hansyke and Roxby connection. I don't care *that* for them."

" Our grandfather made his money in trade," Nicholas said stubbornly. " He was the only Roxby who ever did —and I suppose you think we're the better for having lost most of it."

His sister pressed his arm ; looking down, he saw Richard Roxby waiting for them on the wide landing below. He handed his sister over and followed them down the staircase into the great hall, where he found that he was to take his cousin Clara in to dinner, and did. Dinner was something of an ordeal, and he was too excited

to eat ; but he contrived, before the first carriages came, to write himself on Sylvia's programme for four dances. They were not the first, and he escaped at once, praying that he would not be required to dance with any strange young women, into a corner of the first room. The brilliance of the scene dazzled and overwhelmed him. Everything was rich, easy, and magnificent ; everywhere were lights and flowers, a warm scented brightness ; everyone smiled or laughed, in a perpetual soft undertone to the violins. It was all new and alarming to young Nicholas Roxby. There was no display and very little gaiety in his mother's austerely ordered house. He saw Cynthia glide past on Hugh Hervey's arm, and envied the assurance with which she moved through so much splendour. A moment later he caught sight of Clara Hervey : she was not dancing, and an impulse compounded of shyness and civility drove him to make his way across the room. She danced with him twice and comforted him a little. She was very kind, he thought, and he was sorry when he had to give her up to another partner : her brown eyes looked after him with a gentle mockery. After that he fell into dreadful hands. A short impressive woman, with a domineering nose, bright unkind eyes, and a superb head of grey hair, tapped him on the arm and pointed to the chair beside her own. He obeyed at once, fascinated.

" You're not dancing, sir."

" No, ma'am."

" You can dance, I suppose ? "

" Yes, ma'am."

" You can't talk. . . . You're by way of being my nephew—in marriage—as you would have known if I had been able to face a family dinner to-night. I'm your host's sister. Or perhaps you don't recognise Mary Hervey's husband as your host. And in that way you have a faint right to think yourself a nephew of mine. Your Aunt Louise, sir."

"Thank you, ma'am," Nicholas murmured, and bit his tongue, mortified by such helpless awkwardness. Her attention was distracted from him. "Look at Mary Hervey. She's not fifteen years younger than I am, and I might be her grandmother. She won't dance—out of pure affectation. She's a simple, honest, proud, conscientious fool. Don't stare at me like that, sir": the fierce eyes, in whose depths something bright lurked—anger or a tear?—started at him. "I'm accustomed to say what I choose."

"You'll excuse me, Aunt Louise," Nicholas said civilly. "I have a partner for this dance." He bowed and retreated, not a little pleased to have escaped from his tormentor with something like dignity. His partner was Sylvia, and though he sought her in all three rooms, he did not find her. He saw her at last—dancing. Her partner was a tall personable man; she admired him immensely. The boy read it in the very droop of her dark head; they passed him and she smiled. She had completely forgotten that this was *his* dance. He stood with his back to the panelled wall and watched her, his young face as white as his tie. She was too beautiful, incomparably more lovely than his sister, she carried herself like a young queen, her eyes were stars into which he would never dare to look. Would she remember his next dance? He hung about on the edge of the room, trying to persuade himself that he was invisible to everyone else. She did remember; she went round with him very graciously; she even smiled at a poor little boyish joke he made. His happiness and his wild misery fought together in his body, choking him. They went round the rooms twice, and Sylvia said that she was tired. He looked silently at the fresh glowing face below his chin—and escorted her to a chair near her mother. Five minutes later he saw her waltzing, in the arms of the same personable fellow, and the bitterness of the stroke almost steadied him. He turned away into the hall where

Richard, pitying him, poured him out a glass of burgundy and left him to drink it.

John Mempes, who had poured out his own burgundy, glanced at him with sardonic amusement: had he ever been so young? If he had, it was in a different world. He had seen, in his lifetime, the face of England completely changed. A resistless force had stirred, groaned, and thrust, and a hitherto submerged layer had appeared on the surface, altering the whole lie and structure of the land: the middle classes had arrived. Grey to Gladstone —what a descent! The Whigs were finished, everything was finished. The old families, ruling autocratically through their land, and the prestige and stability it gave them, had been jostled from the political scene, and their places filled by the damned canting purse-proud snobs—he ought, God forgive him, to be making himself civil to their women at this moment—to whom treachery and the fear of revolution had delivered the country. So it seemed to him. The changes went deeper. A certain ease, a spaciousness, was lost. He had been brought up in the belief that so long as he comported himself with a decent civility, his mind and body were his own, to dispose of as he pleased: he could believe what he chose, say what he thought, and sleep where he would be welcomed. But not now. Middle-class notions of morality were squeamish to a degree that appalled him when he thought of it. He wondered grimly how many times to-night his tongue would give offence. Most subjects were better left alone—but he was too old a dog to learn.

Mary had just come into the hall. She stood for a moment under a lamp, to speak to Cynthia Roxby, her head turned a little over her shoulder, so that the rise of her throat was thrown into relief by the light. It made a pure fine line with the slope of her shoulders and the slender curve of her body above the waist: below it the outline of her body vanished in fold on fold of flowered silk. Mempes smiled. She knew what a figure she

made ; she knew that she could afford to stand in the full blaze of the lights, challenging Cynthia Roxby's youth. She had never had great beauty, but she had, he said to himself, its spirit and clear essence, a quality and a charm which the years fined. She reminded him of Schubert's songs, of one in particular, of an air clear and deep, simple and elegant, gay, delicate, melancholy. An emotion stirred in him—not love, not pity—but a reminiscence of both, a fine inassuagable point, feeling for his heart.

She turned her head, saw him, and started impulsively across the room. He met her half-way, ignoring a new twinge in his foot. Seen close, she looked, if not her age, her position : she was very stately for so small a woman. He told her so, and pleased her.

" It was very civil of you to come to-night, John."

" I shall be dying of gout in the morning," he said blandly.

She was watching Sylvia. The girl had danced four times with Captain Ling ; she looked up at him as she danced with a shy haughty admiration : she was flattered —and conscious of her beauty—and excited.

" Rupert is a handsome creature."

" Your daughter thinks so."

" He's forty-six, at least."

" A fatal age," Mempes said drily. " I was somewhere a little short of it when I fell in love for the last and worst time."

Mary laughed at him. " I should have saved myself trouble if I'd married you. . . . But I shouldn't have had my own way. To have had it is something—a great deal."

" You'd be nearly a widow, if you'd married me," Mempes observed. " I feel damned old to-night, Mary."

He looked old, and forbidding. Mary stood beside him in silence, and considered her younger daughter.

Louise had offered to take Sylvia back to London. "The other girl's not worth showing," she told Mary bluntly. But would Sylvia like it? Mary had discovered already in the young girl a will as stubborn as her own. She was wilful and defiant; there were dreadful scenes, in which, under cover of disappointment and hurt pride, a latent hostility, unyouthful and bitter, had come to the surface. Yet she loved her mother; she showed it a dozen times a day: and Mary was proud of her, planned for her future, thought for her, as never for the docile Clara. But the child must do as she was told.

Mary sighed; she almost doubted the wisdom of letting Louise handle the unpliant young creature. She asked Mempes suddenly if he advised it.

He started. "Eh? Show her? Of course you must show her. You bred her to marry well, didn't you?" He had, at that moment, an obscure premonition that Sylvia Hervey would disappoint her mother. He liked the girl, and his acquaintances were sometimes edified by the spectacle of John Mempes walking stiffly, his top hat down over his eyes, through the ugly Middlesbrough street, with Sylvia half dancing beside him. She was now, though barely eighteen, as enchanting a creature as he had ever seen. The Millais portrait of her, painted a year earlier, shows an imperious young beauty in yellow silk, her hair folded closely about the narrow face, her small fine mouth curving to a smile. The picture has a faint hint of uncertainty, an appealing softness, that the sitter rarely had. Sylvia Hervey was not often uncertain; she had a quick harsh temper, a sharp tongue, and a more than youthful egoism: but—draw a little closer to her—she was gay and recklessly generous, she was not a snob, she rode fearlessly, she neither flinched nor lied. She would lead her husband a devil of a life, Mempes thought idly: then, as she swept past smiling, a new thought struck him.

"Why don't you take the girl into the firm, Mary?"

Mary gave him a startled glance. "Sylvia! She has never shown the least interest in it."

"Too proud to ask," Mempes commented. "But she hasn't anything to do, and energy enough to drive a ship. Give her to me: it's a risk, but I'll take it." He could see that Mary did not like the idea. She looked obstinate.

"It's unsuitable," she said bluntly.

"Unsuitable? My dear Mary!"

"I *had* to work," Mary said seriously. "She has no need to do so. She'll marry and find plenty to live for. The other—what you suggest—isn't necessary, or possible. . . . Why are you willing to teach her? You did nothing to help me—when I began." He thought he caught a faint indecision in her voice. If he persisted he could convince her—but why should he persist? He was tired, his old enemy was threatening on both flanks, and he was persuaded—it was one of his few convictions—that no good came of interference with another person's life. He smiled lightly at Mary. A moment later she left him alone again, her short darting steps carrying her quickly out of his sight.

A growling voice behind him said: "This Jurançon stuff is too sweet. Take it away. . . . How d'ye do, Mempes? These damned servants of Hervey's are clumsy brutes. I believe they're all unemployed dockers. The man's capable of it."

George Ling had grown fat, veinous, and rich. His black squinting eyes were merrier: he enjoyed his riches, though he was drinking and eating himself into his grave. He could not get there fast enough for Mempes, who loathed him. He joined in his person all the qualities of his age that the older man disliked. Mempes was no idealist, to object to the licensed debauching of the world by trade—but he could not stomach George Ling's talk of Progress; nor his resolute piety—to which George's activities in an Englishman's Paris formed an odd tail-

piece. "The miserablest hypocrite God Almighty ever put guts into"—was his comment, uttered loudly at a public dinner. It might be true; and it was also true that George Ling was an indulgent husband and father—and a warm man of affairs.

Six years ago, in the reconstruction of Garton's, he had bought the steel mills from Mary: his rashness terrified him: he kept his wife awake at night, to hold his head and listen to his groans: "I shall be ruined—ruined." He was not ruined: he bought on easy terms, in a market that had touched bottom. At once trade swelled, and prices rose, and before the next inevitable fall, George Ling had become rich. He grew bold, had other enterprises—and agents in China and Africa who were not taking orders for steel rails.

He was in a good humour. He poked Mempes with a thick finger and said: "Have ye set eyes on our Rupert? He's back from America as thin as he went, and his pockets empty. I'll do something for him. But he'll not have it. He'll go his own way and die poor."

John Mempes looked at him coldly. "You'll die poor yourself," he observed. "I hear you're buying land."

"It's time I established myself," George said earnestly. "I've offered for Hawke's estate—been in the family for four hundred years. Cost me a mint of money to put in order when I get it, and not two per cent. return. But—worth it, I tell you. It isn't what you can make, my dear fellow. Though there's something to be raked off the game, if you preserve carefully, I daresay. It's the prestige, the standing. It stamps a man, Mempes. I've made money—but that's only half of it. You're nothing in this country if you haven't land, and never will be."

"It will ruin you in the end," Mempes said cheerfully. "Your grandson will be glad to sell it and crawl back to trade. This country's going to the devil. That gloomy fool 'ull finish us." He distrusted Mr. Gladstone, not

merely for his disservices to the Whigs (who received him as Dido did Æneas, and came to much the same end): Mr. Gladstone's enthusiasms left him cold; so did the public manner, the heart-searchings, and the portentous gestures of that massive intellect.

"The man has principles," George ventured.

"Principles! I don't care a twopenny damn about his principles," Mempes said coolly. "He may have as many as he pleases, provided they don't interfere with his duty, which I take is to keep the country quiet and the Radicals where they belong. You're too squeamish, Mr. Ling, to relish the truth. Principles are a man's private business: you can't run the country on 'em. The fellow's a national danger, sir—the damndest bore I ever listened to—a demagogue—too clever by half."

George rolled an uneasy eye at him. "You're an uncomfortable fellow, Mempes. They say you're a sceptic—I daresay it's true—but I can't tell what you are. You're too stiff for me. . . . Did ye hear my son's marrying Lady Sydney Pytt? Her mother was a Steyning. A lift for the lad, eh? She's doing well for herself: he's a good boy—I shall make 'em an allowance. It'll stretch me a bit. The works are on short time, y' know—steel don't move much now. She's used to six footmen, my boy tells me. Have to do with two when she marries." He sucked in his cheeks. "Two footmen! Eh? Is it enough?"

"Are you asking my advice?" Mempes said lazily. "Two should be enough, I think. I take it you'll stand them one on each side of the bridal bed, to perform the grooms's duties for him."

He moved away before George Ling had got the better of his congested emotions. He was ashamed of wasting powder on the fellow. Propped in a doorway, he watched the dancers. A moment in which, down a narrow avenue, he could see to the far end of the long room, disclosed Miss Flora, alone on a couch, a thin upright figure in

purple silk. She had a neglected air, he thought, and feeling increasingly ill and tired, he dragged himself stiffly towards her, his hands clasped behind his back, holding it straight.

Miss Flora did not notice that she was being neglected. Strange feelings had taken possession of her light worn-out body, a sense of ease and strength, such as she had not known for years. She sat alone, on the very edge of the wide couch, placidly smiling, her hands folded on her knees. She had danced in her young days, once, at some Assembly Rooms. She could remember nothing about it, nor any of her partners, except a dim masculine outline, moustached and braided, faintly alarming. She could dance now, if anyone were to ask her—but no one would ask her ; she was old and faded and the music was different. Her feet under the purple silk tapped lightly on the floor, she closed her eyes ; she *was* dancing, the chandeliers swung and glittered, the fiddlers nodded their heads at her—one, two, three, and round—how lightly little Flora moves, she'll be pretty one of these days, her eyebrows are very fine. Miss Flora straightened herself and smoothed the folds of her dress, looking covertly to see whether anyone had noticed her strange behaviour. One of the dancers stopped to speak to her. A smooth young voice said : " Are you enjoying yourself, dearest ? "

" Thank you, Sylvia," she said. " I'm very happy." Sylvia had taken one of her hands and was stroking it. " Go on dancing, my dear. You'll never have anything like this again."

" Why, what can you mean ? " the girl said lightly. " I shall have balls, and parties, until I'm old. Better ones than this."

What *had* she meant ? She watched Sylvia float away, radiant, excited, smiling over her partner's shoulder—and still her own words echoed in her mind. If she could remember what had prompted them—there had been something, some intimation—but she could not: it

hovered for a moment, and withdrew, like the ragged edges of a dream, fluttering out of her waking sight.

She glanced at Sylvia's partner. Rupert Ling had spoken to her earlier in the evening. He said he had owed her an apology for thirty-five years ; he was laughing at her, of course, and she did not look at him. She looked now, and a tremor of excitement ran through her. She had made a discovery—why had she never realised it before ? Rupert Ling was the Devil. Her instinct had warned her of it years ago, in his boyhood. She saw herself running breathlessly up the stairs in Mark Henry Garton's house, clutching her heart ; there were tears in her eyes and she was saying to herself : " That boy is a devil—a devil." She saw him clearer now. The Prince of Darkness—she took another look at him. He was detestable, and fascinating. No other man in the room had so much ease and vigour : he was tall, clean-shaven, with thick reddish-brown hair lying smoothly to his head, and a strong graceful body. His bodily perfection, which she divined rather than saw, was the most terrifying thing about him. She sat stiffly on the edge of the couch, uncertain and confused. The excitement which had come upon her in the first blaze of recognition died, and the lightness of her spirit went with it. The figures of the dancers, the bright clusters of the lights, the music, half gay, half melancholy, the pervasive scent—lilies of the valley, wasn't it ?—the panelled walls, the curtains stirring gently in the open windows, faded and retreated. She was losing hold on them. Alarmed, she struggled to her feet, and at the same moment felt an arm under her own. She looked up and saw Mr. Mempes.

" I should like to go now, please," she said hopefully.

To her relief, he made no bones about taking her away at once. Steadying her, with the fingers of his hand pressing her wrist, he piloted her down the room, and into the hall, which was crowded with gentlemen. She looked

at the staircase, and shook her head. "I can't get up that," she declared. Mr. Mempes hardly seemed to hear her : he beckoned a servant, and spoke to him in a gentle voice. The man went away, and Mr. Mempes turned to persuade her up the stairs : he talked to her as they went, but she paid no attention to his words, thinking all the time how chivalrous he was—the pleasantest man she had ever known. On the first landing Mary's woman was waiting—almost as if she had expected them, Miss Flora thought. Mr. Mempes withdrew his arm ; and holding firmly to the woman's, breathless, trembling, happy, she curtsied to him in the elaborate style she had learned as a girl, and turned thankfully towards her room.

Hugh Hervey watched them from below. Mempes stumped down the stairs and ordered his carriage. He saw Hugh and nodded brusquely : "I'm off, Hervey. I'll not disturb Mary. Tell her. I'll thank her in the morning, if I live through the night."

"Very well, sir. Good-night."

Hugh looked after his retreating back with a sympathetic grin. One of the minor triumphs of his life was that he had earned John Mempes' respect. He liked the older man, and appreciated his fine coolness and the staunchness of his spirit. There were few like him left.

He shouldered his way through the hall to watch the dancers in the first room. The floor was half empty, and his stepson and Cynthia Roxby were waltzing together with an evident sense of their skill. Hugh leaned in the doorway. Richard was an attractive young man and the girl was charming, as pretty as paint, and knew it. They passed him, absorbed in each other. Hugh smiled. How easily he read the grave excitement of Richard's glance : he knew what it masked, the unanalysed emotion, the thrust and rally of desire, the pain, the longing, the dizzy mounting pleasure. He knew more about it than Richard did, and that it died by its own hand. He was

not so sure what Cynthia was feeling ; she had a pleased air, but—she was cool, a cool hand.

" Do you admire her ? "

He turned to smile at his daughter. Clara's small humorous face was puckered with amusement.

" You've been in mischief, Clarry."

" I went round with old George Ling," she said in his ear. " He was furious with Mr. Mempes—said he'd been insulted—too shocking to my modesty to repeat. He was so angry you never heard—so heavy you never felt—and so swollen you never saw. I bounded on and off his stomach the whole way round. And I tore my skirt. Don't tell mother."

Hugh laughed. He knew the girl better than her mother did. She had retained, with the softness and curves of childhood, something of the child's terrifying simplicity. Her mind, which no one had thought it worth while to train, was quick and lively. She borrowed books from his library ; she had convictions, too, picked up God knew where, queer enough convictions for Mary Hervey's daughter to harbour. Mary knew nothing about them. She never asked ; the girl grew up, and changed, almost unregarded. She worshipped her mother so simply and honestly that she was shy and awkward under Mary's eye : mortified and astonished, she heard herself making foolish remarks ; she grew desperate, bit her tongue, knocked against the table, crimsoned, rushed from the room. Hugh alone understood this—from the days when he watched her, a small fat clumsy child, seated hour after hour at work on an endless series of pincushions and handkerchiefs, the line of her patient slow advance marked by crimson drops. Mary accepted her gifts gravely, and put them away in a drawer ; she would not have destroyed one, but it did not occur to her to use any of them. Poor Clara.

" Hadn't you better get someone to sew you together ? " Hugh suggested.

"Nicholas stepped on it," Clara said dreamily. "He is *distracted* by Sylvia, and she laughs at him. I shall never marry, my dear—no man will have me, I'm sure, unless it's for a bet. Men are hard-hearted wretches." She smiled at him and darted off. He stifled a yawn and saw his sister beckoning imperiously. He made his way to her round the room.

"Where is your wife?"

Hugh glanced round. "I don't know. In the next room."

"Why don't you look after her?" Louise said angrily. "She has run away with John Mempes for all you know, or care."

"Mempes won't run far to-night," Hugh murmured. "Why should you suppose my wife wants to leave me?" He did not hear her reply: he was startled and delighted to see, between the curtains, a paling sky. The short May night was over. In a moment the morning would come with banners, and the shrill bugling of the thrushes, and the light drums of the wind. As he watched, the arch of heaven became translucent, an eggshell held against a flame. Light throbbed behind it, poured through it. The peaks and canyons of a new continent appeared in the sky, remote and vast. Hugh was seized by the moment. In as brief an instant as it took him to lift his hand he noted the strange appearance of trees, blossom, and wet grass in the ghostly light, the half-empty room, Mary standing with her hands clasped behind her head—a miracle, of life arrested in its flight. He felt—as if he had cried to the moment: "Stay, thou art fair"—time under his feet. He was secure, consoled.

Louise touched him on the arm. "There's something going on in the farther room, Hughie. It's time your provincial swells went home. Surely they've had their money's worth? I want to go to bed." Her eyes, sunk in their sockets, implored him. She would not leave before Mary did, would not give in. He got up, walked

over to the band, told them to play *Morgenblätter* and be off to their breakfast in the kitchen hall. As he turned away, his moment, smiling, looked him in the face—the violins—the seductive air—the long crystals of the chandeliers—outside, the wet grass sparkling in the light, the whistle of a boy or a bird, in the garden. He remembered it again at the end of his life.

In the third room three dowagers were sleeping soundly in their chairs. At the far end, his daughter Sylvia, standing, steadied by Captain Ling's arm, on the back of a couch, was singing to an audience of the younger guests. Hugh paused to take it in. Defiance had brought rich colour to the girl's cheeks ; her eyes sparkled with the enchantments of youth and mischief. Hugh sighed : she was the loveliest, the most wilful, the most impossible creature. He walked up to the group. It scattered as he approached, and he stood in front of the girl with a fine ironical smile. " You can't sing, you know, my dear. Never heard a dismaller croak in my life." He noticed for the first time that her chin was the spit image of Mary's—and so, by the stud book, of Mark Henry Garton's, whom Mempes spoke of as " stout-hearted buffoon."

" Listen, dearest. I'm practising a song I mean to sing to my mother and your wife. It's my sentiments exactly." She folded her hands in mock modesty and began again :

> " For I can bake and I can brew,
> And I can make an Irish stew,
> And wash a shirt and iron it too,
> But—I *must* go out on Sundays."

Her voice ran down in laughter. Hugh frowned. He was disconcerted by Captain Ling's interruption. With a smile the man swung Sylvia off the couch : she was not displeased—she seemed, indeed, to like it. Disturbed, Hugh walked to a window and dragged at the curtains. " Off home with you," he said. " Look at the sky. Who'll ride with me in an hour's time ? " He left them

and went back to the hall. Nicholas Roxby was leaning against an open window. The boy was flushed and smiling ; he had been drinking, not without discrimination, but steadily, for the last four hours. Hugh surveyed him with a friendly smile.

"Time you were off to bed, Nicholas."

Nicholas shook his head, pleasant and obstinate. "You have a very fine place here, sir, and the air is fresh. I have drunk too much of your admirable burgundy. You'll forgive me, won't you ? "

Hugh's heart warmed to the boy. "I offer you an arm as far as your room," he said.

Nicholas smiled sweetly. "You're very kind, sir. To tell you the truth, I was thinking of dying. Phillida flouts me. 'With Daniel she did dance, On me she looked askance.' I shall die of it if I do not die of old age first." He was very gay, very miserable, and some years older than the boy who had spoiled two ties in the agitation of dressing for his first party. More to oblige Hugh, whom he admired, than because he was inclined to sleep, he allowed himself to be persuaded upstairs. In his room he stood in front of a long glass and looked critically at himself. He should, he thought, have been more changed. He tore off his clothes and rushed into bed—to fall, between fatigue and unhappiness, instantly asleep.

Hugh did not come down again, and alone at last, Mary went up to her room. She was not tired : she had not danced, but the music, the gay, sentimental, witty music, had insinuated itself into every corner of her mind. She smiled as she changed her dress. She loved these nights—the talk, the violins playing Strauss and Schubert, the sudden dawns—these mornings when, in an empty world, the air rang like a hollow crystal to her quickened ears. They had the quality of early experience, of events sunk in the eternity of childhood—that *simple* world in which such nights as she remembered were no more than the dark mysterious framework of a single voice, of

words (to which, if any answer had been made, she had forgotten it) still echoing in her mind, of a candle in her mother's hand, of a perfume that recalled Charlotte's bedroom and the corridor outside, endless to her childish feet. The days then had a bright clarity, in which all objects appeared to her bathed in a clear light ; how soon and falteringly it faded from the world—so that in rare moments when, as now, she saw it welling round her, she could think herself but one night divided from that confident child. If she could but reverse the moment—if she could look through the child's eyes *forward*—with what love, what warmth, what pity, she would greet each day before letting it go—and if she forgot everything else, would remember what songs Charlotte Hansyke had sung, and the tunes they went to. The rest might go hang.

She turned from the window with reluctance and went downstairs. The day—it was now six o'clock—was warm, with a light ground mist. She was first in the dining-room. The smell of the newly roasted coffee hung in the air ; the sideboard was spread with cold dishes : she stood there and cut slices of ham and cold raised pie. Cynthia came into the room and leaned against the window with a cup of coffee in her hand. She was an enchanting figure, and knew it. Does anything sit on a slender body better than a dark habit ? Richard thought not : nervous and elated, he walked about the room, a wedge of cold pie between his fingers, discussed the day, the ground, the fences, was pleased with his boots, astonished by the fineness of her morning skin, by turns depressed, excited, cool.

The horses were brought round. Cynthia admired Hugh's, a rich red chestnut with a capital head and neck. Hugh was pleased by her taste : he made a catalogue of the horse's qualities for her. " He stands 15.3—his muscle well-placed, his shoulders admirably laid—his quarters are very powerful—he has a beautiful mouth and manners. He moves with a lightness and ease I've never known

bettered. He has quality, my dear—an indefinable neatness and grace—I can't describe it."

Cynthia smiled. "I can see he has." She let Hugh mount her—she was as capable as Sylvia of mounting from the ground—and moved off behind him. She has *sunk* Hugh, Mary thought. She saw his face.

She watched them go. The mist, now lifting and going off by ragged companies, curled round the horses' legs. The limes sent a shower of cold drops on Sylvia's rosy face. Hugh pulled his horse to let Richard give Cynthia a lead. Mary watched them until they reached the long grass and the curve of the hill : strangely out of spirits, she turned back into the house. In the hall a servant gave her a message from Hugh's sister : as she went upstairs to Louise's room, she reflected that no other guest gave her so much trouble. Yet she liked her sister-in-law, and had long since ceased to be afraid of her savage tongue. She found Louise sitting up in bed, her hair drawn under her cap, her face freshly painted. The older she grew the more, and more boldly, she painted : the effect was sometimes startling.

"I shan't sleep for an hour," she said. "My fool of a woman said you were breakfasting downstairs, and I sent her to say your company would be welcome. You're pale."

Mary smiled. "You didn't send for me to talk of my looks."

The beaked nose and starting eyes were intimidating this morning. "I had a mind to talk to you about Hugh," Louise said directly. "He's not happy."

"Nonsense. Hugh is perfectly content. The stable has done very well this year."

Louise overlooked that. "I suppose you've not forgiven him for going off with that portentous young woman. Don't jump at me. I know nothing about it. I'm only guessing."

"You can talk about it if it amuses you," Mary said

deliberately. " It's years since I've thought of it. That's not true. It's years since I cared. . . . I'll tell you about it if you like. He was going away with her, without telling me. He meant to come back. I found out before they left—and made him stick to his plans. He did come back—and had her in a village near Danesacre after that. How long ? I don't know—years."

" Your fault," Louise said coldly. " Why didn't you hold your tongue about your discoveries ? It would have run itself out. I suppose you made a scene. Hugh *loathes* scenes. You're—middle-class, Mary."

" Why not ? " Mary said calmly. " I'm half Garton . . . It wasn't pure vulgarity—no Garton likes to lose a valuable property." She paused, surprised that she now knew herself so well. Hugh had made her suffer—but he had taught her very little. Afterwards, when she was in love with Gerry Hardman, she had discovered that it was of no importance to her whether she possessed him or not : he might do what he chose—she was his, past prayer. Suppose she told Louise that ?

" Is there anything, any person, except that yellow creature—you say Hugh's finished with her—between you and Hugh ? " Had Hardman been her lover ? She would never know. " You look honest and are as secret as be damned," she said suddenly. " Now, *I* look like Jezebel, and blab everything in my mind. Do you mean to tell me that since Hugh went off—and came back—you've lived in the same house, like brother and sister ? It shocks me."

" Did you expect me to compete with her for Hugh's attentions ? " Mary said ironically.

" You should have known nothing about her. God bless my soul, girl, did you expect a young man to have *no* curiosity ? It wouldn't have lasted six months—but for your obstinacy. You forced him to stick to her. What a situation! "

" Why discuss it now ? " Mary said. " It's finished."

" It's almost finished," Louise said placidly. " Hugh is on the point of forgetting that you were ever his wife. Do you imagine that can't matter to you ? Was ever a woman such a fool ? You're bound to Hugh, you rely on him, you count on his affection, which you don't deserve. If you'd ever known the meaning of compassion . . . you can't have imagined that Hugh was vicious ? He loved you : you needn't have troubled yourself about a Fanny Jardine. You're an unloving fool, Mary. You was his first. You knew that when you married him. You thought too much of yourself. You was filled with some bitter self-conceit that made you deny him because he'd had another woman. Ain't you ashamed of such a poor low spirit ? There . . . I've said what I think. I can't bring myself to apologise to you. Now turn me out of your house." She fell back on her pillows, quietly angry and perplexed.

" I don't want you to go," Mary said gently. " I daresay you're right. A kinder woman—I didn't make myself, Louise. My life has been strange. It wasn't like yours, and Hugh's." She saw a curious gleam in her sister-in-law's eye. Pity ? Not disposed, whatever it was, to enjoy it, she got up and walked towards the door.

" There's something undisciplined about you," Louise exclaimed. " You don't learn."

If I am undisciplined, Mary thought, it's not my fault, nor the fault of my life. She went away without answering, and shut herself up in her study to think of a contemptuous old woman and of an account she had not balanced. She was presently summoned by a frightened girl. Miss Flora was ill—dying. She hurried upstairs, startled and unbelieving, to find that it was true.

CHAPTER TWO

"WHAT a life I have had," Miss Flora said happily. "The infinite mercies of God and Mr. Mempes."

What life could she have had? Mary wondered. She knew its spare outline—a timid girl, the daughter of an army chaplain, who died of fever : his wife hastily took the infection and followed him, leaving their only child to make what profit she could of innocence and virtue. She went from family to family, leaving with each a little of her youth, her courage, and her spirit : at the time she reached Hansyke Manor she had already been made bankrupt for all three. After that, what had she become? A voice to which no one listened, an unregarded hand, turning over the pages of Mary's life : she had been with Mary when her son was born, had patched Mary's shabby dress in Mark Henry's house, had cried over her when she married Hugh. Why, she had known Mary Hansyke longer than any person still living ; she was her childhood, her youth, half her life—but what was she of herself?

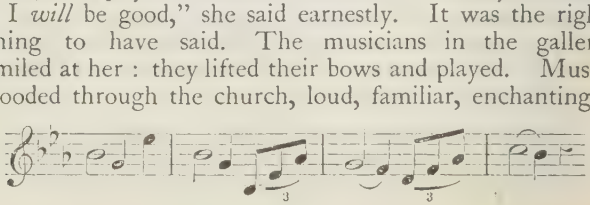
Mary was put to it not to fall asleep. Miss Flora's room was warm and quiet. Miss Flora herself had not moved since she made her amazing comment. She lay, like a brown leaf, between the window and the wall. Was she asleep?—or rehearsing one of the propitiatory little speeches with which she had been accustomed to brave a new situation? "I think—a fine day, ma'am. Oh yes, yes—but of course—I am prepared to—I can take my meals *anywhere*."

She seemed struggling to speak. Mary bent over her. "You were always a kind little girl," Miss Flora said clearly. "I was sure you would never run away with

Mr. Hardman. You have too much goodness." She closed her eyes again.

Mary sat down, and saw Gerry Hardman with great distinctness : her heart beat no faster ; she smiled, and thought quietly : That's finished then. She thought of him without longing and without bitterness. He had stirred in her feelings and desires that at the time had been stronger than herself ; she would not have protested against anything that he chose to do with her. She was too honest to pretend now that she had been less submissive. Her thoughts took another colour—if nothing remained of that experience, what had she ? She started to her feet. Nothing—nothing—no touch from which the warmth had not gone—only memory, the grave of thought.

Miss Flora walked down the aisle of St. Mary's Church at Danesacre. She could not remember how she had come there. She must have walked along the narrow cobbled gully of Harbour Street, climbed two hundred steps to the dizzy edge of the cliff, looked back at the little town lying, far below her, in the lip of the harbour, heard gulls screaming, seen the sharp flash of wings in the sunshine, felt the flagged path warm under her feet. She remembered none of these things. The old church was filled with people. Every square pew had its count of heads, the sun poured in through the shallow windows that reminded her of the windows in a fisherman's cottage, the three-decker pulpit swayed like the mast of a ship in the bright light. All these people were here for her. She turned and looked at them from the nave, with pity and affection : what could she say to them? " I *will* be good," she said earnestly. It was the right thing to have said. The musicians in the gallery smiled at her : they lifted their bows and played. Music flooded through the church, loud, familiar, enchanting :



her heart beat joyously in her side. "How happy I am," she said: "how delightful this is." She knew now that she had come to be married. She glanced shyly at the tall bridegroom, whose averted face—he had not looked at her—had a formidable gravity, very comforting to her gentle spirit. The music grew louder and clearer. It thundered over her: she felt herself being penetrated and dissolved by it, and in the last recesses of her mind another thought stirred. What, when all these good people went away, leaving them together, would happen to her? I shall have a baby, she thought: a dreadful pang sundered that dissolving body, and Miss Flora shuddered. "He will kiss me with the kisses of his mouth," she said.

The scene vanished—and she forgot it—like a dream. Now she saw that she was in bed. The sides of the bed rose to an immense height: she looked up between them to receive the last messages of the light. For a moment, she saw Mary's face, close and distinct. A wilful girl, she thought, but not wicked—never wicked. She shut her eyes. An unfamiliar voice said gently: "She's sinking fast." Miss Flora heard it. I didn't know we were at sea, she thought drowsily. Time had been playing its tricks on her again. As she thought that, it played its last.

The doctor was short-sighted. He had to get down on his knees to satisfy himself that the old lady was dead. "A quiet end," he observed. "It's over now, Mrs. Hervey. They die easily, at her age." The brain in the tired body was still living. It lived on for a moment after he had spoken, an inconceivably fine thread binding her to the farthest star. When that snapped, Miss Flora and time were quits.

CHAPTER THREE

SYLVIA was kneeling in the window of her room, her face, between folds of smooth hair, grave and excited. She saw Captain Ling when he came round the corner of the house, and drew back. A moment later he was out of sight, in the big square doorway. Sylvia sprang from the window.

"He's come, Clarry."

Her sister dropped the book she was reading. "Did you know he was coming this morning, then?"

Sylvia nodded. "He told me—when we were dancing." She would dearly like to tell Clara that she had met him twice since the dance, in the lower wood. The second time she had gone there to meet him directly after Miss Flora's funeral. The wet grass soaked her to the knee as she hurried through it. She wrung a trickle of water from her black dress, and laughed. She wavered: Clara's blundering honesty might give her away. It would never do—she would boldly tell her mother about the meetings rather than be found out. She held her tongue, and contented herself with a mysterious smile. She was far older and wiser than Clara, an experienced woman. She had experienced everything in the moment Captain Ling put his arms round her. She turned her back on Clara: she had only to close her eyes and there was Captain Ling, and the moment. She contrived to answer him when he spoke to her. She thought she had kept her head, and she was proud, poor child, of her coolness in such a situation. She leaned against him, aware now only of his voice and his smiling glance. If she lost him—unconsciously, she tightened her hold. She had given up trying to understand what he said—what *was* he talking about? love? his long search for her?—or what was happening to her: she

hardly knew herself. A strange weakness—strange to her—made her tremble. "I feel—I don't know what is the matter with me," she stammered. Did Captain Ling know? His smile was triumphant. She drew herself out of his arms, half angry, half afraid of her bewildering emotions. Then she saw that he was disconcerted, and threw herself into them again, almost crying, thinking of nothing but her need to reassure him. "I love you. You can be sure I love you. You believe me, don't you?" He did not answer her, but, mysteriously comforted and upheld, she surrendered herself to a delicious happiness.

The moments passed. She began to grow alarmed. She jumped up and walked impatiently about the room. Suppose her mother did not send for her? Her cheeks flamed: she ran to the door and opened it, prepared to walk defiantly into Mary's study. She heard their voices: her mother's, clear and peremptory, decided her. Not troubling to answer Clara, she ran across the landing.

Ling had his back to the door; he swung round when she came in, and smiled at her. Her heart beat quickly: "How handsome he is," she said to herself. His smile, his air, had a mischievous gallantry that delighted the girl. Now she would face anything for him. She thought her mother was angry, and stiffened herself to face that.

"Sylvia," Mary said gently, "is it true that you want to marry Mr. Ling?"

"No one else—ever," she stammered, taken aback.

"I think he is too old for you," Mary said. "And too poor."

This was too much. Sylvia was ashamed to look at her lover. She was surprised to see him still smiling, and unmoved. "You will do what you can to make me unhappy, I know," she said furiously. "I *will* marry him. You shan't talk to him in that way. I had rather have him than the richest man in England."

"You'll have one of the poorest," Ling said lightly. "Unless your mother changes her mind."

Mary stood up. "Go away, Sylvia," she said. "I can't talk to Mr. Ling over your dead body. He doesn't need your protection," she added drily. "You can take my word for that: I have known him longer than you have."

She turned to Ling. "I think," she said thoughtfully, "you had better drive into Middlesbrough with me."

Her quiet voice deceived both of them. She never—how well she had learned this particular lesson—gave herself away in the moment of defeat. She would not be laughed at or pitied. From conceit, the conceit that she was invulnerable, she hid even from her friends her despairs and humiliations. She had cried, an agonised girl, in Wagener's arms, and been rebuked for it. Since then only Hugh—and he so long ago that he might be supposed to have forgotten them—had seen her tears. Yet there was a time when she wept every night, bitter scalding drops that destroyed her youth. She had thought then that her life was finished, yet it had gone on, and the only change in her was that she felt happiness more and sorrow less sharply than before. She was like a beaten child who, his weeping done, sees for the first time in his life the brightness of the sunlight on the wall of his room. When Gerry Hardman left her, she did not tell herself that her life was over. She was better disciplined. Yet he had given her a sharper and more complete happiness than she had known with Hugh.

At this moment she was in despair. So much mischief had been done that, even if she contrived to get rid of Rupert Ling, she could not undo it. He had corrupted the young girl's mind. She closed her fingers sharply on the edge of the table. She would have murdered Ling then and there if it could have been done cleanly and quickly, without fuss. She did him to death as he stood beside her, smiling and careless; then

invited the murdered man to continue their talk in the carriage.

"You were always a thorn in my side," she said lightly, "since you were an unkind teasing boy."

"You had your revenge," he retorted. "You did me out of my ships."

Mary laughed. Everything depended on her wit. If she could convince Ling that she was hard-hearted enough to leave Sylvia without money—if she hid her dislike and despair—she might get rid of him. She looked at him across her desk in the Garton office: his face wore the roguish inquisitive smile she remembered from her childhood in Mark Henry Garton's house.

"Why try to mislead me, Mary?" he said mildly. "You know quite well that Sylvia will run away with me, if I ask her. Then you'll give in, as ungraciously as possible, and settle her handsomely. You don't want me to drag her round the world with me, do you? It's a rough life."

"If you were in love with her——" Mary began.

"How do you know I'm not? I could be, easily. I could settle down, too—if you make it worth while. I shall be a kind husband. I've had my life." He paused, and said: "I've sometimes thought I'd like to plant trees. I've seen forests——" He broke off. Mary had a distinct sense that he was on the edge of some personal surrender: he had all but given himself away to her. Even he, perhaps, had unlaid ghosts. She waited, anxious and friendly. If he would be frank with her . . . the Lings were an untrustworthy lot. Rupert laughed.

"I've beaten you this once," he said gaily. "You'd better give up. We're cousins, and I'll behave well. I'll take five thousand a year and a place in the firm. Come, Mary."

"We're not cousins," Mary said deliberately. "And I'll see you damned before I'll let you touch my ships. I can't lock Sylvia up—but I give you my word that you'll

marry an orphan. You'd better believe me. Now go away. I'm busy."

Amused, he took himself off. She sat for a long time, perplexed and restless. Once she roused herself to summon Mempes, but changed her mind. He would tell her to give in before she was beaten—the one thing she could not bring herself to do. She must interfere, must protect the young girl from herself. She did not believe that her daughter had inherited any Garton or Hansyke toughness. Slowly, as she sat there, another thought pressed on her. Through the open window of her room she looked out on part of the docks and the river, crowded with steamships and sailing ships : she saw the blue funnels of a Garton boat, and alongside her, parting the bright air, the masts and spars of a west coast barque. She knew the barque. Built in 1859 as a wool clipper ; now, cut down and shorn of her perfection, she had still an air of grace, the clean lovely line of a ship built to run down the easting in heavy seas. For the first time in her life Mary regretted the triumph of steam. Alone among Danesacre shipbuilders in the 'sixties, she had believed in it, built for it, and been justified of her obstinacy. Now she saw that her youth and her winged dreams had gone with the sailing ships : in the new age, of speed and size and power, she was middle-aged and untroubled by dreams. She smiled lightly. One by one, her illusions were being stripped from her, the illusion of happiness, the illusion of success, and now the illusion of power. She had imagined that the new age was her work : what childishness—it had used her, she had run her easting down before an implacable wind. Bound to what port ? The ship knows only that it moves.

Mary struck the desk lightly with her hand. "I shall come home," she said to herself, "to a Danesacre wharf, and if the harbour is empty, all the better, and if no one who knew me is on the wharf, better still. I shall be free at last."

She worked with Mempes over agents' reports until six o'clock. Mempes left then, and she was leaving, when a clerk came in with a message. Mrs. Captain James would like to speak to her. Mary knew all her masters—the senior captains made their reports to her, not to Mempes—and their wives. For Mrs. James she had a deep and real affection. Her husband was master on one of the four sailing ships still owned by Garton's—four out of the six China clippers built by Mary in the late 'sixties : driven by the steamships off the China seas, they were taken for the timber, guano and nitrate trades. Mrs. James did not care what the voyage was—she made it with the ship and intended to make every voyage with her until Mr. James retired. Unlettered, dauntless, possessed of an insatiable desire to see and hear any new thing, she was as well known in the stark little harbours of the west coast as the skipper himself. On one occasion, her husband stretched on his bunk with a broken thigh, the mate under arrest for insubordination, the second no navigator, she navigated the ship for thirty-four days and brought her comfortably into Iquique.

She came into Mary's room with an air of loving anxiety. "I've summat to tell you you don't want to hear," she said. "Yon Ling——"

Mary sat down. She listened coldly, and her manner warned Mrs. James not to criticise Mary Hervey's daughter . . . .

Ignored and dismissed, the young girl gave way to a fit of anger that startled even Clara, more familiar with Sylvia's temper than the rest of the household. She tried to soothe her. "Darling, I implore you to be sensible."

"How can I be sensible when that woman is spoiling my life ?" Sylvia said furiously.

Clara laughed suddenly and deliciously. "You said exactly the same thing when she wouldn't let you cut a fringe last summer."

Sylvia stopped, taken aback. "Did I ? I mean it

now. You don't understand." She wanted to cry. She saw herself stretched on her bed, dying of a mysterious illness : Captain Ling was brought to her, too late : she smiled at him with her last breath, left him the memory of a glance, and died. The mournful end was too much for her. She smiled, saw herself in the glass—how unlike death—and flung herself on Clara. "I won't be defeated," she cried joyously. "I'll show you all." Her quick brain was already turning over plans : she must act, must manage these people. "What shall I do now ?"

"Wait. Let Captain Ling see what he can arrange. I should."

"You could wait," Sylvia said arrogantly. "I can't. I must put things right. I shall get Nicholas to drive me into town. That boy will do anything for me." She ran out of the room quickly : she had remembered that Clarry was in love with Nicholas—how silly to make herself unhappy for a young man who did not so much as see her when she came into a room. Poor Clarry! She stopped at the foot of the stairs. The wide hall was cool and dark except where a shaft of light struck through the half-opened door. She crossed it and stood for a moment on the terrace, between the house and the sun-drenched lawn. At last, she thought, my life has begun. The years of her childhood lay behind her, already dimming in memory, divided from her by the bright spaces of this moment, to which they had been only the antechamber and dark entry.

Nicholas had fallen asleep in the orchard, his head on the crumpled pages of his book. He sat up when she touched him and looked at her with bright startled eyes. She leaned over him. "Will you drive me into town, Nicky ?"

"To the end of the world," he said seriously.

She laughed at him. "Fifteen miles, my dear. *Can* you drive ?"

"I've driven my mother in a gig at my grandfather's

place in Berkshire since I was nine years old." He stood up and they eyed each other, the boy flushed and smiling, the girl grave. She was half ashamed of herself. Yet, why not? Why not use him? She slipped an arm in his—how young he was; his heart beat against her arm.

"I wish you needed something more difficult," Nicholas said. "I'd like to do it for you. Oh, Syl, I love you."

"You can kiss me if you like." He shut his eyes and kissed the smooth cheek she offered him; his lips trembled. He steadied himself with an effort.

"I do like you," the girl said gravely. "You must never think I don't. Do you suppose anyone saw us? Let's run." She hurried him into the house. "I'll meet you at the stables. Pretend you're a little bored."

"Why—when I adore you?"

"Do you want every stable boy to know?" she said, impatient with him, and vanished down the passage leading to the kitchens. She found the tandem cart in the yard, a groom busy with the harness.

"What are you doing, Marshall?"

"Putting 'em to bed, Miss Sylvia," the man said bitterly. "'E don't want 'em after all."

"Then get them ready again," Sylvia ordered. "Mr. Roxby will drive them into town, since my father doesn't need them." This was better fun than the gig: her eyes sparkled with mischief. She turned back into the house to warn Nicholas, and ran into him in the doorway. "Can you drive a tandem?" she demanded.

"No," Nicholas said promptly.

She almost shook him. "You must. They're ready, and the gig isn't. I'll drive them myself if you won't. And you told me you wanted to do a hard thing for me! Are you afraid?"

"I'll drive them, if you tell me to," Nicholas said. "But I shall probably kill us both. Or worse, hurt the ponies." He strolled across the yard, hoping that his

dismay was not apparent. The groom's jaw dropped. He turned reproachfully to Sylvia. "I thought you said Mr. Richard was going to take 'em."

"I said Mr. Roxby," Sylvia murmured, her eye on the horses. "Mr. Nicholas Roxby, Marshall." Mr. Nicholas Roxby smiled pleasantly. "A good pair of ponies, Marshall," he observed. The groom's face said clearly that a London Roxby was no Roxby at all. The boy pulled himself together. Be damned to you for a Yorkshire tyke, he thought happily. He would not for the world ask the fellow's advice : he had forgotten Sylvia ; all he wanted was to put these Yorkshiremen in their place. He cocked an eye at the ponies and climbed into the cart, slipping the reins into his left hand as he sat down. He did not answer Sylvia when she asked him how he felt. She ought, he considered, to hold her tongue now. He felt the mouths of both horses, and drew the leader slightly back. Marshall was up behind : "He drives as cleverly as my father—if you're still nervous," Sylvia whispered. The boy looked at her. He nodded to the man at the wheeler's head and dropped the point of his whip on the leader's hocks. They were away.

For a brief instant he felt as if he were taking his first fence again, a small child on a horse alarmingly too big for him. Then he realised, as he let the leader move into his collar, that the horses were moving together perfectly : his excitement vanished in a sense of ease and happiness. This is the most marvellous moment of my life, he thought : I shall always remember it. He felt his strength running through his wrists to his finger-tips. His mind was on the horses, but, unconsciously, he noted other things, the fine turf by the road, the coolness of the wind on his eyelids, the rooks circling round the weathered belfry of the village church : he forgot his southern prejudices and began to recall that the Roxbys were northern-bred, and that this was their country. The

horses were going well up to their bits : he sat finely straight, with a smile on his lips.

The only sharp corner in the road lay a mile ahead, and the boy reasoned that if he drew the leader well back the wheeler would get them round the corner without crossing his legs and falling. The reasoning was sound enough : the unforeseen flaw was a butcher's cart, which so annoyed the leader that he turned back to sneer at it. Nicholas hit him across the face. The cut had no effect, and he heard Sylvia say : " Clumsy! " He turned the wheeler in time to prevent the worst and brought them to a standstill.

" Let Marshall take them," Sylvia ordered.

" You asked me to drive you to town in the thing," Nicholas said coolly. " And I'll drive you there—or take you home again. Now be quiet." He turned the team round and forced the leader into his bit. The groom held his tongue, and now Sylvia held hers. She glanced once at the grim young man and for the rest of the drive looked straight in front of her. In the yard of the *George*, she let Marshall help her down and disappeared inside the inn. Nicholas followed her unhappily : his exultance had deserted him, and he tried, as he walked down the dusty passage to the sitting-room, to compose apologies. When he opened the door, she had her back to him. She whirled round and stammered : " I'm sorry. You ought to have smacked me." He stared at her, incredulous and amazed. There were tears in her eyes. She came and stood close to him, her fingers on his arm. He had never seen her like this, softened and pleading : his head reeled.

" You're so lovely," he said, half happy and half wretched.

" I'm not. I'm detestable. Oh, my dear, I wish I weren't. Why won't you have Clarry ? "

What nonsense was she talking ? The boy cried out, and put his arms round her : he was filled with pity and a

longing to protect her. It seemed that she did not want him to protect her at this moment, but the voice in which she said so was gentle, and as he walked beside her to the offices of the *Garton Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering Works*, he felt a return of his pride and confidence. If such moments could only last a lifetime, he thought.

In the outer office she asked a clerk eagerly whether Captain Rupert Ling were still with her mother. The clerk had just told her that he was, when the swing doors behind him parted to let through two men, of whom the second was Captain Ling. This was the first moment in which Nicholas suspected her. He acknowledged the older man's greeting, and watched, shamelessly, the movements of Sylvia's head as she talked to him. He drew some comfort from her manner ; she was abrupt and haughty with Ling : yet—when she turned to ask him a question—it was the soft, yielding Sylvia of the *George* sitting-room who spoke to him. He was so surprised that he hardly heard her.

" Well, Nicky—shall we go and look at the boat, then ? "

" Eh ? " the boy stuttered. " What boat ? "

She was amused. " Captain Russell's boat, my dear. The *Savannah*. You've been asleep."

The other man was Captain Russell : he was tall, heavily built, with a clipped moustache, and blue eyes sunk in veined wrinkled hollows. He had invited the three of them to drive down with him to the docks, to see over his ship—the latest and biggest of the Garton boats.

" We won't tell my mother," Sylvia said gaily. She slipped her arm in Nicky's and walked out of the office between him and Captain Russell. Incomprehensible girl ! She was a different creature again for this man—a bluff, friendly, candid young woman. She had him sit beside her in the musky old cab, talked to him of his voyages and freights, showing a surprising knowledge of such things. Nicholas sat with his back to the horses : a

glance at Ling's profile on his right struck him afresh with admiration: he was as boldly personable a fellow as the boy had seen—a bit of a *spadassin*, but likeable. He ventured to make a remark, which was ignored by everybody. After that he looked steadily out of the window. The cab was bumping over a cobbled street past flat mysterious uninviting houses: they had reached the docks; he gazed, with a landsman's borrowed delight, at the ships filling the river.

The *Savannah* was lying in mid-stream. To reach her they had to cross two sailing ships. As he walked over the deck of the second he saw a weathered strange little body emerge from a passage-way to stare at them. Sylvia pulled his sleeve. "It's Mrs. James," she whispered. "She'll tell my mother. I don't care—I won't let her scold you."

She was in a mood of boisterous gaiety: she ran, the mad creature, up the gangway, followed Captain Russell over his ship, poking her lovely face round every door he set open. She did not glance at Ling: once she took Nicholas Roxby's arm with a gentle affection that lifted the boy's hopes—and then, suddenly, she had left him. Ling took her up to the bridge, and he found himself seated in the saloon, facing Captain Russell across the table.

He stayed there, he thought, for hours—time enough to watch the sunlight travel the length of the brass rail at his back. He existed in a dream of rage and misery: Captain Russell's pleasant melancholy voice, a strange persistent undercurrent of the dream, flowed on and on. He was ashamed, at last, of his inattention.

"How old would you think I was?"

"A difficult question, sir," the boy said smilingly.

"Thirty-seven—to-day. I've been at sea twenty-four years. I haven't married. You'd be surprised how the sea takes a man's thoughts off marriage. Suppose now I married a Danesacre woman—my town, Mr.

Roxby. I'd come home off a voyage and sit down to listen to her ; her head half out of the window, she'd say : 'Now who can that be coming out of Mr. Sandbeck's gate ; it must be his mother's cousin, one of the Middlesbrough lot ; yes, she has a look of them, something about the eyes ; those Sandbecks are as like as two peas : yet perhaps it isn't her.' And she'd not be content until she'd placed that there woman—if it took the whole of my leave. It would go on all day, until night : at the most inconvenient moments—there are moments, Mr. Roxby, in a man's life with his wife, when he expects her whole attention. At such moments it's not pleasant to hear her say to herself : 'It must have been Mr. Sandbeck's own aunt, his father's sister—the one no one knows : yes, that's right.' All the same, it isn't right. It makes a fool of a man."

He unlocked a cupboard door and brought out a bottle of port and two glasses. "You'll take a glass with me, Mr. Roxby? You won't? Oh." He stared absently from the bottle to the young man. "Oh, very well. It's not worth opening the bottle. Lock her up again. I can do without things. There's nothing I'd miss, much. I had a sister once I was fond of; she brought me up : when she died and we buried her, I thought—they were covering her up at the time—'Well, that's finished and I haven't a soul left to live for, except my step-mother and you could hardly expect me to live for *her*—she's a queer woman.' Yet would you think it, Mr. Roxby, as I walked away from the grave, I couldn't help feeling pleased I was alive : there was a thrush singing to split his throat on a flowering currant alongside the path, and a little wind titupping in the grass. 'Well,' I said to myself, 'Sarah can't see 'em, but you can.' Ha. Yet I've never forgotten her. The money I used to send her I spend on books, in Newcastle book market. I've time to read, at sea : I'm very fond of words. You're perhaps too young to dwell on words, Mr. Roxby—but

they'll come to you. *Unpopulous:* how's that for a word? I've been in places where I might have gone loony if I hadn't been able to say to 'em: 'You're unpopulous, that's what you are.' So life goes on."

Nicholas was now so far past decency that he did not remark the end of the captain's speech. The two of them sat in silence. Nicholas strained his ears to catch the sound of a footstep overhead. What were they doing all this time? What had she to say to the fellow? The cabin was now emptied of the sun: he could hear nothing but the cries of men at work on the quay, and the clang and rattle of a crane. She came suddenly, a step on the deck outside, and her voice in the doorway. He stood up, stiff and weary. She was radiant: she dazzled his eyes.

"Are you tired of waiting for me, Nicky?"

"Tired!" He choked.

"I'm sorry." She came close to him: he felt her excitement, her happiness. Why, he did not exist for her: she was blind, mad, dreaming. She breathed as if each breath were a delight. His own breath half strangled him. "Do you know how late it is?" he said.

Sylvia sighed. "Is it late?" She followed Captain Russell across the gangways of the other ships to the quay, and thanked him, with frank heartiness. In the cab, she leaned against the thin worn leather and closed her eyes.

"You can shut your eyes," Nicholas said, "but you can't hide the colour in your cheeks."

She sat up, to look at him. The boy groaned. "What is he to you?"

"Everything."

"You're mad."

She smiled. The cab stopped in front of the *George*, and there—it was waiting for them—they saw the Hervey carriage. Sylvia smiled again—had she expected it? Nicholas wondered. She held up her head and stepped into the carriage. Mary Hervey leaned forward. "Mr.

Hervey will drive you home, Nicholas." Her voice was gentle : it stung the boy. He felt humiliated almost to tears. He turned into the yard of the *George* in search of Hugh, whom he found examining the leader's harness. Hugh looked up with a friendly smile. " I hear you drive with a light hand, Nicholas. Marshall says you brought them along in fine style this morning." An immense gratitude filled the boy—he stammered it out when he had climbed up beside Hugh. Under the shock of knowing that he had lost Sylvia, his thoughts steadied themselves. He would help her—if he could—if she were not too sure of herself to need help. He was not unhappy : he felt, indeed, exalted. He remembered an occasion during his first term at school when he had felt the same strange emotion. The school, that is, the generations of boys who composed it, had evolved a fine art of viciousness in theory and practice : one evening he crept, a child driven for the moment past endurance, tormented in spirit and hating his body, into a boot cupboard, to think of his mother, to whom he could never explain what was happening to him. Seated stiffly in the tandem cart, Nicholas watched with rueful amusement his younger self rubbing the dust from the window of the boot cupboard. He peered over the child's shoulder, trying to see what it saw—a square foot of old lawn, miraculously bedewed in every blade. Strange that it could comfort him : there must have been something else, a memory still more remote, a word uttered in a fresher world and echoing in the child's mind. He strained his eyes and ears : the child came closer, showed him a bright face, and was gone : the moment was gone, leaving its light pressure on his mind, as sunk now and imperceptible as those tracks made on our fields by the feet of Roman legionaries, and as ineffaceable. It was a question of angle, he thought ; from the right angle in time any moment was recoverable.

" What are you smiling over, Nicholas ? "

"I hardly know, sir. It's a fine evening." He was less sorry now for the child in the boot cupboard; he remembered the bursts of laughter that had been as frequent as the awkwardness, the recurring shames, the tears.

Hugh set the horses going over a level stretch. "I have a two-year-old I'd like you to try," he remarked. "He's hot and easily upset—but you'd be able to ride him."

"Thank you, sir." . . .

Mary was startled by Sylvia's egotism. The girl was thinking of no one but herself. She cared nothing for her mother; nothing that Mary said moved her. I've lost her, Mary thought despairingly. I have no authority over her now. She's hard, too; I can do nothing with her. Sylvia confessed boldly to the meetings with Rupert: she was calm; she said outrageous things with complete assurance, as if she were no longer a very young girl. She had grown up in a day.

"You don't care for me," she told Mary. "Richard is your only child. You look on us, on Clarry and me, as two children whom someone has asked you to bring up. You feed us and clothe us and are kind to us—but you don't *love* us. You love Richard."

Mary put out a hand. Her body sheltered a girl, younger than Sylvia, who took her baby from kind crazy Sarah Roxby's arms, and laughed with the tears still on her face. No one in this house had seen that girl, who could not hear what Sylvia said, and yet knew the answer to it. No one else knew it. Mary hardened her heart against the defiant young woman facing her from the window-seat. She is Hugh's child, not mine, she thought. But how handsome she was, and—in spite of her obstinacy, her hardness—how defenceless. Surely she could be outwitted for her good.

"Don't fidget with that cord," Mary said sharply. Sylvia's involuntary obedience made her smile: after all, the child had not gone far away. "Come now," she

said, " let's talk like reasonable women. Do you realise that Captain Ling is older than your father ? "

" As if that mattered ! "

" It will matter," Mary said grimly. " In twenty years' time you will not be forty, but he will be sixty-seven —older than Mr. Mempes."

" I've heard that Richard's father was an old man when you married him," Sylvia said cruelly.

Dismay followed anger in Mary's mind : the change in the young girl had gone deeper than she thought. Mild measures were now no use. She spoke quickly. " You expect me to treat you as a grown woman, a woman old enough to be married—and you behave as an impudent little girl. You're too big for me to send you to stay in your room, but I must ask you to leave mine, until you know how to conduct a civil discussion. Go away, Sylvia."

The girl turned scarlet. She stood up, took a step towards the door and stopped. " I'm sorry," she faltered.

Mary did not look at her. She was too wise to press her victory : the balance hung, she knew, between surrender and a sullener defiance. She opened a drawer of her desk to take out some papers. She heard Sylvia move : the movement ended in a rush, and Sylvia, her lips trembling, stood beside her. " I'm sorry, mother. Do forgive me." Mary glanced at her : she forgot the need for strategy and saw only the pleading child, whose wilfulness she had wrestled with and forgiven so many times. She could recall a dozen such moments— the furious child, her small body shaken with passion, the scene, the hot words, and then tears, and a reconciliation. No one was ever gentler, more anxious to atone than Sylvia, when she had behaved badly. Her hardness was a pretence ; the real Sylvia was generous, diffident, needing affection and kindness. Did it never occur to Mary that both might be real ? At this moment she

found it hard to believe that this affair was more serious than those others.

Sylvia was soon consoled. She dried her eyes and sat on the arm of Mary's chair. She agreed, without enthusiasm, to everything : she would wait two years—longer, if her mother wished it. Mary was very cautious : a little of the sharpness, the mysterious dread, with which she thought of her son had entered into her thoughts of Sylvia. She began to think less of her plans for the girl, and more, and with more anxiety, of her happiness, which for the first time she saw threatened by forces in Sylvia herself whose existence she had never until this moment suspected. With her sense of them a subtle change came over their relationship. Sylvia had discovered that, young as she was, she could speak to her mother with unbelievable harshness. Mary had been angry ; and a moment later, she had been gentler than usual, and she had given way about Rupert. She did no more than glance at her discovery : she clung to her mother, and was yielding and affectionate, anxious to please. But she had learned the lesson.

Mary sent her away and went in search of Hugh. She found him working in his room : he laid down his pen and smiled at her. Then he saw that she was very troubled, and waited for her, knowing that if he spoke first he would never hear what she had come to say.

" Would you say I was stiff-necked ? " she demanded.

She had always seemed to him—though he knew that she could be obstinate, narrow-minded, and ruthless—humbler and simpler than any woman he had known. " Why do you ask ? "

" I don't know. Except that we are told that the stiff-necked will be humbled."

" Do you believe that ? "

" Certainly," she said seriously. " It comes in the Bible." She turned a candid gaze on him. " I seem to have made so many mistakes. I've brought up my

daughters badly. And you—Louise said you were unhappy, that I'd been an unkind fool." Her agitation surprised them both.

"You've been kinder to me than I deserved," Hugh said.

Mary frowned. "I wish that you'd forget I'm your wife, and tell me—as if you were judging some other woman—how much my . . . stupidity was to blame for our failures."

"I can't judge you, Mary. I'm quite aware that I made a fool of myself—and that you behaved with incredible decency."

"Hugh, I implore you. Don't repeat those—phrases. I want the truth. Don't smile at me. Yes, smile if you like. You have a sweet smile. . . . I never thought about it, you understand. I took it for granted that our marriage was finished, since you had gone away with Fanny Jardine. When you went, I was very unhappy. I behaved badly, I didn't try to be wise and self-controlled. I stupefied myself by crying—at night, every night." He looked up quickly and saw a smile on her mouth. "That sort of thing doesn't last; I came to an end of it at last. You still had her. There were other things—my life wasn't over, as I had thought." She turned to him with a sudden vehemence. "Hugh. It's sixteen years since you fell in love with that girl—a lifetime. I'm getting old, my life is more than half finished—and I don't understand anything. I don't understand why you left me, nor why we failed. We meant so well. It must be my fault. I've always contrived, and managed, and known what I wanted to do. I must have contrived this, too, without intending it. Hugh!"

His hands shook, and he folded them over his papers. "You did nothing," he said, "except let me go off with her—and come back here. I'm not sure whether I was more of a fool or a scoundrel."

"When you went, you promised that if you needed me again—you'd tell me."

"Upon my soul," Hugh exclaimed, "you'd say *anything*, Mary. I can't talk to you about that."

An extraordinary excitement filled her. "Then you didn't need me?"

Hugh stood up. "How can I tell you the truth, when I don't know it myself? Fanny was never what you were. She was everything else. That can't hurt you now. I won't talk to you about her, Mary. You're not decent; I can't turn out all my pockets to satisfy your insatiable desire for information. I haven't asked you why you dismissed Hardman . . ."

"I didn't," Mary said calmly. "He ran away from me."

Her directness startled him. "My poor dear!"

"Are you thinking that I wasn't able to keep my lover either?" she said clearly. "You needn't feel sorry for me. I haven't been unhappy." She came close to him, and spoke with a simplicity that touched him. "You mustn't be angry with me, darling Hugh. I asked you those questions from stupidity. Louise would say it was want of breeding. It's because I think slowly; I don't understand, I don't believe, what I haven't, in so many words, been told. Everything has to be explained to me. I can't see yet—in spite of Louise—what I could have done. I couldn't—could I?—come to you and say: 'Haven't you had enough of your Fanny yet, Hugh?' And I couldn't embarrass you by openly loving you. I had to stand clear. But I never thought you were a scoundrel." She laughed delightfully. "You don't look like one, you know . . . I made far too much fuss about it. You should have explained it better to me at the time."

"You ridiculous child," Hugh said. "What could I have explained to you?"

She smiled at him doubtfully, and went away.

He was too disturbed to work: after an hour of wasted effort he gave up trying, and walked round to his paddocks.

He had given up his racing stable when he came on the Board of the reorganised Garton's. He gave up the Mastership of the Cleveland Hounds, and the kennel he had built up with so fine a judgment and managed on the lines laid down in Goodall's Practice. It is doubtful whether Mary remarked the sacrifice : she knew far less about his horses than he about her ships, and she had more than her share of the Yorkshireman's contempt for what he does not understand. He had, indeed, spent, for many years, far more than he could afford, and when he gave up owning—he never gave up racing—he sold all his stock, half-bred and thoroughbred, to clear the more pressing of his debts. He continued to breed hunters—a mare out of his stable ran second in the Cambridgeshire this same year—to ride to hounds, and to produce, at long intervals, those monographs of his researches in the fourteenth century, written, a critic notes, with a wit that serves the scholarship and a scholarship that excuses the wit. He once told Mempes that he believed he led the perfect life —and so perhaps he did—but it did not satisfy him.

He was lonely ; as he grew older, he retired more and more behind the cover of an exquisite civility. To the ironmasters and shipbuilders whom he met at his own table he was an enigma, which he did nothing to unravel for them. He did not dislike them—they were solid, honest men, inspired, a few of them, as much by vision as by lust for money—but he distrusted them. He did not believe in the validity of a future prepared by inspired shopkeepers. He believed in very little—though he would have been puzzled to say at what moment in his career he had realised that life is too short to bear the weight of even the least significance. After that, everything he did was done, with unfailing patience and care for perfection, to fill in the little time.

When the light retreated, bearing away with it the shapes and colours of the hills, he left the paddock and walked along the rough cart track towards the moor.

The darkness—it was the last night of May—was opaque, and the night so still that, standing on the crest of the moor, he could hear a horseman on the valley road, five miles away. The stars seemed closer to the earth; they gave off a soft radiance which so subtly penetrated the air that every dip and curve of the forbidding region in front of him was clearly visible. Forbidding it was, as if the blood of Danish invaders, soaking into the ground, had charged the place with their fierce spirit.

He was too tired to walk on any farther, and looking about him, saw a low mound, the grass-grown fragment of the Danish camp. He seated himself against it and closed his eyes : at once, an image as sharp and distinct as the reality, his wife stood there, diffidently smiling. His thoughts were uncertain and confused. He was now so far past the confidence of youth that her words, recalled in this place, roused in him no emotion but one so bitter and deep-rooted that, instinctively, he turned his back on it. He did not want to be reminded of his youth and their marriage. It was better to leave unexplored that region of his mind—in which, at any moment, he might come upon a young man who would regard him with the mingling of deference, pity, and surprise with which he himself regarded the old gentlemen to whom he listened, respectfully and for hours, in his London clubs. He had no desire to engage his youth in one of those interminable colloquies.

Nothing could change in him his ironic sense of failure. He had been nothing enough—neither scholar, writer, nor lover—to escape the necessity of time. He wrote, lacking the courage to look further into himself, from his mind, and discovered in history only irrefutable witnesses to the reality of time, which makes nonsense of men's hopes and passions and achievements, and levels the bier of the general with the grave of a forgotten foot-soldier. He had failed, through blindness, as a lover, and now he saw that love, the most frail and tenuous of human dreams, is

yet the only one that life does not abandon—a traveller casting away one by one all useless possessions—on her journey towards death. Like a mother, attaching herself to the weakliest child, she keeps it with her to the last. What a fool he had been to miss the company he might have had.

He stood up and struck a match to look at his watch. It was ten o'clock. The long walk down the steep lane towards his house was a return to spring : the air grew warmer and heavier, burdened now by all the scents, fresh and pervasive, distilled into it from the living darkness of the trees, the stone wall, in which a little warmth still lingered, the lilacs against the house, and the fine turf springing under his feet.

He crossed the lawn to the terrace : two persons who did not see or hear him were standing at the farther end. He saw Richard stoop to Cynthia Roxby's face, and the girl's arms parted in a gesture of surrender.

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM his seat in the Board room of the Garton offices Mempes could see, traced on the glass of the row of windows that begins where the mahogany panelling leaves off, the masts and funnels of a large steamship, the pitched timbers of a shed, and the arms of a stationary crane, outlined against a sky of almost mediterranean blue—a frieze which decorated the room much more suitably than does the life-size portrait of Mark Henry Garton, whom the artist caught in one of his worst moments, looking more clownish than jovial, and more rascally than either. The room was unconscionably hot.

Mempes chose himself a seat as nearly in the shade as possible, and sat down to wait for his fellow-directors. At the far end of the table Mr. Hall, the secretary to the Board, sat and wrote: he had tucked a large yellow handkerchief round his neck, where the sun fell on its exposed nape. John Mempes regarded him with disfavour: did the fellow imagine that the heat excused him for appearing in the Board room dressed like a bandit? The shipping trade was going to the devil, owners were laying up half their ships, the whole of Tees-side was on the edge of ruin, shipyards idle, ironworks closing down—and this fellow must pamper his damned neck. "Good God, sir," he broke out suddenly, "why don't you bring a parasol in with you?" Mr. Hall lifted an astonished face: before he could speak the door opened on William Adam Todd.

The banker—he was known familiarly in Danesacre (he had no familiars) as Sweet William—rolled into the room. William Todd had all the oddness, the strong, peculiar individuality, associated with this corner of Yorkshire and with Danesacre most of all, from its solitary

station at the end of a narrow valley and its long sea traffic—both things, the isolation and the service of the sea, being calculated to bring to the light every strange lurking demon in a man's mind and spirit. He nodded curtly to John Mempes, whom he disliked, and settled himself hurriedly in a chair. When he walked or stood, his short hooped legs put him at a disadvantage. Seated, he could examine with satisfaction the reflection in a long mirror of the majestic upper half of his body and his massive head. He mopped his forehead and began—a calculation repeated at all the weekly meetings of the Board—to work out how much of the room belonged to him, just as when he walked about Danesacre he consoled himself for the figure he cut by reckoning up the number of streets and men his fortune represented. It was the only pleasure his fourth share in Garton's gave him, since he was out-voted on every occasion in which he tried to get his own way.

After these defeats he drove back to Danesacre and punished his wife and daughters. A month earlier he had returned from a disastrous meeting two nights before he was expected, and found that these wretched women had plucked up courage to give a small party. His appearance struck terror among the guests. He said nothing, but plunged the house into darkness by turning off the gas, and stood in the open doorway, a grim silhouette, watching them while they sought feverishly for shoes and wraps. As each one hurried past him, he said courteously : " Pray come again any time I'm from home, ma'am. I'll send to notify you."

When the last of them had gone, he went back into the sitting-room, lit now only by the moon, which entered in the shape of oblique rays, as if it were reluctant to look into the room. His daughters had run upstairs ; his wife was there alone, leaning against the wall. He walked over to her and looked for a long time at her white face. Her dark eyes stared back at him, with an extraordinary

expression in their depths—fear or an unwilling comprehension ?—she said nothing : she may merely have been waiting for the outburst of rage both had expected. At last he said coldly : " Well, why did you marry me ? You should have had more spirit than to take so ludicrous an object. You might have known what would come of it." He turned round and went away, leaving her alone, and trembling with relief. . . .

He took a letter out of his pocket and threw it across the table to John Mempes. " Read that," he said. " It's the draft of a Bill some fool is bringing into the House—medical inspections of seamen, and ' sick bays '—' sick bays,' mark you, as if the brutes weren't pampered already, as if owners hadn't enough expense and trouble—on merchant ships. They'll be asking you to supply every master with a thermometer to take the men's temperatures of a night before putting 'em to bed."

Mempes took the letter carelessly. He disliked the interference in the shipping world of fools and humanitarians, but he disliked still more the thought of agreeing with William Adam Todd. " No need to excite yourself," he said sourly. " It 'ull come to nothing."

" It's your affair," Todd retorted. " But the Line ought to be sold."

Mempes made no reply. He found it difficult to keep his mind on things for any length of time. It played fast and loose with him, sliding in front of the thing on which he ought to be concentrating his attention some other from the past—in colours so fresh and vivid that he was taken in and found himself talking, with pleasurable violence, to the empty air. The knowledge that he was finished, that Mary Hervey had no longer a use for him, irked him. It was making him moody and restless. On one point his mind was clear : he would not resign. Let her turn him off, if she felt she must be rid of him. His heavy face twitched with amusement. After all, she held the last card. She would cry a little over him when

he died—and sell his ships. The four clippers would go to the Dutchmen or the Portuguese. He struck the table with his fist—if he could burn them to the water's edge first ! The momentary spark died down : he caught Todd's eye fixed on him with a gleam of interest, and pulled himself together. Let her sell the lot and be damned to them.

When Mary came in, followed by Richard, and sat down at the head of the table, it became apparent that Sweet William was in one of his worst moods. Hugh, lounging into the nearest seat, spoke to him pleasantly.

" D'you make a habit of coming late to the meetings of this Board, sir ? " Todd demanded.

" I think you're all early," Hugh said cheerfully. " It's barely ten." He smiled at Mempes and began to draw on his blotting-pad : he drew crusaders with the face of John Mempes and Sweet William's legs, an occupation that gave him considerable pleasure. He missed nothing that was said, and if he had anything to say, waited until it became clear that no one was going to save him the trouble of saying it. He never, for instance, opposed Todd : any one of the others could be counted on to do that for him, and it amused him to watch Mary handle the furious old man. She enjoyed it, he thought.

Towards twelve o'clock the meeting looked like making a quiet end, when Mary sprang on it that she intended to lay on the stocks the keel of a large screw-steamer on account of Garton's Line. She contrived—while Todd stared, hardly believing his ears—to tell them a little about it. Todd heard : " Cast steel stern frame . . . triple expansion . . . carrying capacity 4,700 tons dead weight." He gasped loudly.

Mary's face settled into the look of obstinate stupidity he knew well—but he knew that she was not stupid, she was reckless, Mark Henry Garton over again. " The Line is not your business, Mr. Todd."

" The Yard is," he retorted. " It's my business to

inquire into the financial standing of a firm that gives crazy orders when other firms are sitting tight and praying for a wind."

She looked at him coldly. "Are you suggesting that the boat won't be taken over?"

"I'm suggesting nothing except that you're out of your senses," he said, in anger and despair. "You're the Line, you and that yawning fellow"—he nodded towards Mempes, who looked as though he were falling asleep from boredom—"*and* the Works. You place a contract with yourself for a ship you can't afford and ask me to support you. I'll be hanged if I will. The Line will smash, and the boat be left on our hands. I'll resign from the firm, I'll take my money out while it's there to take—eh? how'd you like that?"

"I shouldn't like it at all," Mary said promptly. "But if you want to leave us——" She felt certain that he would not go: he had made the threat too many times. And if he did—it would be inconvenient, but she could weather it. Garton's was too prosperous, too firmly rooted to suffer by the withdrawal of Todd's interest: she smiled ironically at the thought that it was his money, put at their disposal at a crisis, which had saved her and made it possible to ignore him now. She knew—she read him too shrewdly—that she could avert these scenes by seeming to consult him: she would not do it. An obscure impulse, perhaps the memory of her humbling at Mark Henry Garton's hands, prompted her to treat him with brutal frankness. She could afford, since she was safe now and out of his reach, to behave without forethought and without any of those precautions she might have taken to soften her opinion of him. She was most oddly herself when she was behaving most like Mark Henry.

Todd's affection for Mark Henry had outlasted his friend's death: Mark Henry was the only human being whom he had been able to love, and the only one who had

loved him without seeming, to Todd himself, ridiculous because of it. The more sharply Mary reminded him of his dead friend, the less he found it in his heart to forgive her for outfacing him. He thought of her as being possessed of a devil with the temper and humours of Mark Henry. And yet—the likeness weakened him in dealing with her ; he looked for it, embraced it and hated it.

" If you must build," he said gloomily, " why not build what you can afford ? Why steel ? Why a fancy engine ? "

" I'd be a fool to build a ship that was out of date before she was laid down," Mary said. She glanced across the table at John Mempes. Since she was fighting his battles, why had he not come to her help ?

" I should build a couple of sailing ships if I were you," Mempes said lazily. " The clippers are the only ships in the Line that are paying their way just now."

She was annoyed by that. He was speaking the truth, certainly, but he could hardly expect her to take him seriously. To silence him, she began to describe—as if the ship had already reached the stage of specifications, and a model, to be added to the other models which she had carried off to her house as soon as they were done with—the liner she intended to build if the Atlantic firm on whom she was urging it would pluck up courage to place the order. " She'll be so much faster and safer than anything afloat that she'll skim off the cream of the Atlantic trade. She won't carry cargo—cargo isn't worth carrying at high speeds with present freights—but she'll do twenty-five knots, and we'll give her twin screws, each with its own line of shafting and its own engines, well down below the water line—to keep them under and stop them racing at the engines." Her eyes sparkled. " You can imagine the owners' advertisements. The comfort ! And no breakdowns ! Even if one set of engines is out of order she'll come along in any weather. They'll have to put the rudder over to balance her, and with the drag of the wrecked screw it 'ud bring the speed down—but not

much . . ." She had forgotten that the boat existed only in her imagination. "She's a beauty, now isn't she ? " she added lovingly.

Her quick delight—it made Hugh smile, and reminded Mempes of the impetuous girl who had defeated him by a small virtue of knowing what she wanted—gave Todd an opening.

"Remarkable," he said gravely. "You'll perhaps remind us now what the Yard *is* doing." He knew what the Yard was doing as well as she did, but he wanted to see her look foolish.

She was less abashed than he hoped for. She began, with a slowness that angered him, to enumerate the ships laid down, the orders in hand, and the details of a contract for four oil ships just placed by an Odessa firm. "Stop," he said drily : "I know all that."

Mary smiled civilly. "But you asked me. I'm willing to go over the whole year with you if you wish it. Mr. Hall, there is no need to write all this down." She turned to Todd. "Do you want me to go on, sir ? "

He said nothing. She looked round the table and thought how well this meeting was going. Not only had she got her way about the new boat, but she had silenced William Adam Todd with an ease that should have astonished her. A fine morning's work. Her glance was drawn to Sweet William : he was struggling, eyeballs starting out of his head, to get at a newspaper tucked in the pocket of his tails. He produced it at last and spread it out.

"The *Tynesider* has gone for you with a scalpel knife," he said spitefully. "Traitor in petticoats is the kindest they call you." He read aloud an attack on her for her refusal to bring Garton's into the Shipowners' Federation. His sharp eyes watched her all the time. He could see she didn't like it. He chuckled.

"Enough of that," Richard said angrily. He caught a glance of warning from his step-father and stopped, mortified by the thought that he had given himself away.

Got the young cockerel, too, had he ? He read on to the end. " Now what are you going to do about it ? " he said triumphantly.

" Nothing."

" Nothing ? " His face fell before he could remind himself to command it. " Why not ? See, I'll help you, if you say the word." He leaned across the table, his hands eager. " A Danesacre man is behind yon article : John Gill owes the bank money, and can't pay. His Yard's as empty as my hand. Shall I squeeze 'un for you ? I'd have done it for Mark Henry before this."

Mary looked at him sharply. Was he actually being kind, as he knew kindness ? Or only putting her in his debt ? She doubted whether he knew which it was—he must sometimes be baffled by his own duplicity. For a moment—the *Tynesider* had made her smart—she turned over the thought of taking his offer : not because she liked it, but because it appealed to some quality of her mind which delighted in tortuous methods. To harry the fellow, and yet keep herself out of it—so that he never knew she had been stung into reprisal—that would be something. She smiled ; it was not much, not worth the trouble. She told Todd so, and thanked him for the offer.

He looked at her aside. " Are you afraid of the fellow ? Want to join 'em after all, eh ? "

" No," Mary exclaimed. " I'll have nothing to do with them. They have no sense. You can't put freights up by arrangement. What is wrong with shipping is neither the cost of insurance, nor port charges, nor anything at all but too much tonnage."

" That'll be why you're adding to it," Todd said maliciously.

" We can afford to look ahead," she said simply. " In any event—Garton's sails under my orders, as I told you years ago. Take it or leave." She added in a gentle voice : " I don't take orders from anyone, or any Federa-

tion. But let Gill alone. I don't like being abused. I resent it—but I don't resent him."

It was true enough; to the end of her life she was incapable of resenting her opponents, an incapacity which led more than one of them into a misjudgment that made him look a fool and feel that he had been outwitted.

"You brought the attack on yourself," Hugh observed. "You've been very free with your comments on them."

She did not like that. It might be true—it was true—but there was no need for Hugh to say it. "I only told them what I thought," she said mildly. "Every word I said to them about their schemes was the honest truth."

Hugh smiled. She was not more deliberately honest than a child. She had retained the child's terrible directness and curiosity, and she blurted out, with an ingenuous pleasure in her discoveries, what she supposed to be truths. He recalled her public quarrels—of which this was no more the first than it would be the last—and the readiness with which she forgave her enemies, and her amazement when, still smarting under her tongue, they showed themselves less ready to forgive her. Deeply hurt, she would say: "How can they be so unkind?" He had long since given up retorting, as at first he had retorted: "If you had been as gentle with them as you are gentle, and kind and generous, to heaven knows how many utterly obscure and useless persons, you would have fewer pensioners and more allies." She did not want allies, she said. . . .

Mary folded the *Tynesider* and put it on her knee. Later, she would shut herself in her room with it, read it through, and get rid of it. Her self-confidence had left her: she had begun to feel alone and very foolish. Am I being a fool? she thought dejectedly. She set about folding up her papers. Richard's voice made her jump. She listened to him and came to the conclusion that her son had gone mad. Then she thought that she might have mistaken him. He went on: she realised, with a

sharpened dismay, that she had understood him very well. He proposed to call in a committee of the men to help in drawing up new Works rules, having decided that this was the only way to break them of their wasteful habit of striking every time one trade annoyed another by encroaching on its peculiar province. Her small body quivered with indignation. "I never heard of such a thing," she said angrily.

"You'll hear worse," Todd said gleefully. "Youth will have its way."

Richard had turned scarlet. He sat biting his lip and staring at his mother, cut to the heart to oppose her, and yet unable to give way. Her anger made him feel like a small boy: his eyes clouded over and an expression of guilt and resentment crossed his face. How could she be so blind? Yet when he looked at her hands, pressed tightly together, he was almost too wretched to go on.

He tried to explain what he meant. He had talked to the men, made friends with some of them, listened, watched, and he knew that there was a different spirit moving in them. He had felt it thrusting against him from every side. The men themselves were confused by it: they wrangled the whole time, pursuing one or other of the endless grudges of craft against craft. They resented everyone, foremen, managers, himself; yet their very quarrels were struck out of them by the new spirit.

"By an old devil!" Todd exclaimed.

"As if I didn't know," Mary said scornfully. "You haven't made a discovery, my son. After Mark Henry Garton died, there was trouble in the Yard. I thought then that it was only a matter of grumbling workmen. *Now* I know that it's more than that. I'm not quite a fool. I can see what's coming. But I won't give in to any of them."

He knew that she was appealing to him. He could see, through her fine scorn, an anxious little woman, whose obstinacy only made him sorry for her. It took

an effort not to see the look of disappointment she gave him, and the only way he could do it was by behaving as if he were thoroughly out of temper. "Since you know what's coming," he said bluntly, "why don't you do something about it? You can't go on fighting the men for ever. Why don't you make allies of them?"

Todd interrupted him, quivering with pleasure. "You've nursed up a fine young Radical," he said to Mary. "How long d'you reckon you can keep him in order? He's a'most old enough to come off the leading rein."

"I'm not even asking you to treat them decently," Richard said furiously. "If you'd treat them sensibly. There's more trouble brewing among the platers now."

"Quite right," Mempes said suddenly, "there always is, always will be. What do you expect? You can't change it. Why not leave it alone?"

He glanced behind his hand at the angry young man. It was not the first time Richard had given trouble. He wondered how long a time it would be before the boy broke away. He must realise now that there was no room for him in Garton's unless he could reconcile himself to his mother's ways of thinking and behaving. Her love of managing, of detail, which had shown itself so clearly in the young girl, had become with the years a fixed habit against which managers of departments struggled in vain. Any deviation from the rules she had laid down, even from those laid down by Mark Henry, must have her sanction. A break with tradition had to face her severe disapprobation. It happened that the tradition was one which mingled neatly courage and pig-headedness; thus she had planned the Tees-side works in the spirit which prompted Mark Henry to add a blast furnace and an engine works to his little Yard: thus, when it came to treating with the men, she remembered that Mark Henry had warned her against their unions. Nothing that Richard said to her could remove that ingrown

hostility. And just as she would not give way to him, so she would never defeat him. He was her youth. The only thing she could do was to stiffen herself against him until she had forced him out of the firm—but that would finish her. Whatever she did, she was finished. Mempes laid his fingers across his eyes, so that he could see her without being seen. She sat bolt upright, gripping her papers, with a funny air of bewilderment. It hurt him, even while, with a flash of his equivocal humour, he reflected that she might have been all the better for a good beating, if she had been given one in time.

Yet he was convinced that she was right, and Richard wrong. The young man's ideas were sheer nonsense. . . . He knew it, as certainly as he knew that right and wrong had nothing to do with what was happening here now.

"Let's say no more about it," Mary exclaimed. "It's not to be thought of."

Certainly, she didn't listen to a word I said, Richard thought. He despaired. He was sharply aware of Todd's amusement. The blood flew into his head: he sat still, looking at the table, hating all of them, and unable to say a word.

"The boy is absolutely right," Hugh said quietly. "It's the only way to avoid trouble. . . . You can't go on treating skilled workmen as if they were machines. . . . The same idea has been worked out by a Scottish firm; it went very well, and I'd be glad to see Garton's giving it a trial."

He knew what he was doing, and he could imagine Mary's feelings as she listened, with surprise and dismay, to what—after covering his blotting paper with crusaders, each one more frenzied than the last, in the hope that something would release him from the obligation—he found himself forced to say. She would think that he was unreliable and disloyal; and he smiled wryly at the discovery that one kind of disloyalty felt very like another.

He had felt, when he ran away from her with Fanny Jardine, much as now. But the boy was right. He glanced across at her and saw that she was sitting, with a stubborn clenched mouth, looking at nothing. She seemed hardly to be aware of him.

I've done no good, he thought. Yet he continued to explain Richard's scheme to her, and ignored a frivolous comment from John Mempes, in whom a serious occasion provoked, more readily than a frivolous one, the cynicism and the need to appear trifling which so roused respectable persons against him. He was very civil to Todd, and when Richard, his face alive with gratitude, tried to break in, he brushed him aside. The young man had done enough to her, he thought.

"Eh, you're a nice pair," Todd exclaimed. He stared at Hugh with profound mistrust.

"Have it your own way," Mary said unexpectedly. "I don't like it. But try it." She cut short Sweet William's protests. Mempes said nothing, and he took care not to look at her until she spoke to him. Then he blurted out: "You're doing a damned silly thing, Mary. I'll thank you to keep your experiments to the Works. They'll not be allowed in the Yard while *I'm* alive."

"We were discussing the Works," Mary said shortly. She stood up. "Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Hall," As she walked out of the room, Todd stepped in her way.

"Now I know that you're a woman after all," he said spitefully. "Mark Henry would never have given in." She looked at him, with a smile in which there was so much gentleness and pride that he was startled. He drew back. What did the woman mean by looking at him in that way? She had nothing that he knew of to make her proud. Why, she would be ruined in three years. He meant to take his money out of the firm before she lost it for him. He hurried away. She had smiled as though she pitied him. He wished fervently that he could have ten minutes' talk with Mark Henry about her.

It was almost evening when she and Richard drove home together. He wanted to tell her that what he was doing would make very little difference, none at all that she would see, and he was afraid of saying the wrong thing. If he told her what was true—that his scheme was nothing but the feeblest of beginnings—she would look at him with clear surprised eyes, and say: " Ah, but the beginning of what, my son ? " He held his tongue.

He felt wretched when he saw her pushing the *Tynesider* out of sight among her papers. He supposed that she must be thinking of him as worse than John Gill.

He was very proud of her. He admired in her the way she managed William Adam Todd, whom he disliked, on behalf of his wife and daughters, as much as if he had actually seen them weeping the tears which had made such indelible marks on their poor galled faces. He admired above all her air of simplicity, which could not be assumed, since it was exactly the air with which he had seen her confront everything that happened to her. He would back her judgment against that of any Federation. She knew everything about ships—and nothing about the men who built and engined them. She could have no idea how profoundly they distrusted her.

" Your hat is all on one side," he said lovingly.

" Is it ? " She sat up and straightened it anxiously. " Does that look better ? "

" It is straighter. You look beautiful wherever you wear it. . . . I'm sorry about this morning."

She gave him a clear look. " I'm all right now. You needn't worry about me."

" I was doing it for you, you know," he said ruefully. " It began when I was trying to think how to avoid another strike like the last. I suppose you feel that I should have dropped it as soon as I found you didn't like it. . . . Somehow I couldn't do that. . . . I'm very sorry, my dear."

" Of course you couldn't. If you felt you were right," his mother said thoughtfully.

She seemed a long way from him, as if she were not thinking of him at all. She had a habit, when she was troubled about him, of pressing her face between her hands. She did it now. From the moment she gave in to him he had felt that nothing he gained by it was worth what it had cost her. He wanted to give up the whole scheme, to please her—but another feeling held him back. He could not quite do it.

He had meant talking to her about Cynthia. But he knew her too well—he often answered before she uttered it the question she had been going to ask—to be unaware that she did not much like the girl. And Cynthia had forbidden him to talk to his mother about her, a prohibition he did not mean to regard. It was an absurd situation. He was in love with her, and he meant to marry her. He disliked bitterly the secrecy into which she had drawn him. She laughed when he told her so, and said: "Only a few more days, Richie. How you must enjoy a public life!" He did not enjoy living in public, but he enjoyed subterfuge less. Her teasing voice rasped him. When she saw that, she laid her arms along his, and thrust her slender face forward. He looked at her until his senses all but left him and he could see her only by drawing her closer to himself. He touched her lightly. "You will have me, won't you?" he said carefully. She moved away from him, and the gentle movement was an agony to him.

He scarcely recognised, side by side with his passion for her, a strange shadow of it, which, dig as deep as he would, run as fast, he never shook off. This was his lack of confidence in her. She resented it bitterly, since she loved him—and she laid all the blame for it on him: he was suspicious by nature, or he did not respect her, or he was a true Roxby. It did not occur to her to blame herself: she did not notice that between what she felt about him and what she thought was a gulf the most ardent lover could not miss. She could not help thinking that she had

sacrificed to her weakness for him the far more brilliant match she might have made. And so it was always happening that when Richard said to her : " You do love me ? You will have me ? " her answer, given quickly, told him not what she felt, but what she was thinking. " We must try to get a house in Berkeley Square, Richie. I mean to give the most marvellous parties." The reserve with which he listened chilled her, and she cried : " After all, you don't really care for me." In a short time she discovered that she could move him most easily when she behaved with most gentleness and simplicity. Then he surrendered to her, and she could tell herself that at last she possessed him, to the exclusion of all other thoughts and impulses. But when, to try her mastery, she began to put him through his paces, at once, like a badly handled horse, he was off, farther from her than ever. She could not forgive him for it.

He knew nothing of her resentment. He was scarcely aware that he mistrusted her. He held himself during this time in a suspense of thought and feeling, waiting for some moment, some word—he hardly knew what—which would launch him into the felicity of surrender.

His preoccupation with her had the effect of sharpening all his energies. He worked during this time harder than ever. He felt tireless : his mind did everything he asked of it, with an effortless precision, like a machine. Released, as now, from the necessity of thinking of anything else, it swung round, quivering, towards her. He shivered, like a man standing on the edge of a sunlit pool, half in delight and half in anguish at the thought of plunging into the bright water. Only the thought of his mother remained, a shadow falling across the brightness.

The carriage was passing between two rows of iron-workers' cottages. A pitiless June sun licked at their scarred walls and blistered woodwork. The women lounging on their doorsteps were exhausted by the heat : one of them reached for a child sprawling in the road and

snatched it out of the way of the carriage: "I'll teach tha," she said languidly. The child jerked itself out of her hands, staggered, and fell against the edge of the flags. A soiled crumpled morsel of rag and bone, he lay there with the blood welling from a deep cut on his neck.

Mary stopped the carriage. A woman cried urgently: "Run for 'is mother." That was an immemorial phrase, and the street sprang into life. A boy ran, and a dozen women gathered round the little body, from which the blood continued to run slowly, a thin bright trickle in the blackened dust. Mary had jumped from the carriage: she sent it back for the doctor, and went on her knees beside him to look at the cut. She asked for some water.

"It'll hev to be fetched," a woman drawled. They resented her presence there, and her quick speech and gestures.

"Fetch it then," she said curtly, without looking up. As she waited for the water—it had to be brought to her from the pump that served both sides of the street—she felt that all these women disliked her so much that they would almost rather the child did without it. She had checked the bleeding before the doctor arrived, pushing the women out of his way as he came. His manner with them was bluff and coarse: they enjoyed it, and liked him better for it, as if the more openly he despised them as women the more they felt him able to handle their half-starved bodies when these at last broke down. As they drew back to let him pass there was a scurry of feet on the scorching flags, and the mother ran up, a breathless tragic young creature with a shawl dragged across her torn bodice.

"Why don't you look after your brats?" he said cheerfully. "This 'un would have bled to death if Mrs. Hervey hadn't seen to him."

The young woman gave her an indifferent glance. "You should ha' plenty to do without poking in your nose where you're not wanted," she said bitterly.

Mary walked back to her carriage, and a jeering voice called after her : " God bless the kind leddy." Her faced burned. " How they dislike me," she exclaimed.

" They know nothing about you," Richard said. " And they're having a bad year—very little coming in, half the men not working, and the rest on short time."

She sat thinking slowly over the incident, until Richard laid his hand on her knee. She looked up and met his glance. " You're not worrying about it, are you, my dear ? " he asked her, in a soft voice.

" No."

" There isn't anything you can do." He seemed to be assuring himself rather than her, and her heart sank.

" Are you blaming me ? " she said humbly.

He turned his head and looked at her with an intimate smile. It gave her the sharpest feeling of relief. Her hat had slipped over to one side again during her exertions. Richard straightened it for her. " How careless you are," he said, kissing her. " You won't worry about this scheme of mine, will you ? Promise me. I can't bear you to worry."

" Very well, then, I won't."

When they were almost home Mary said: " Tell me about Cynthia, my son. Are you going to marry her ? "

" I hope so," he said soberly. " She says she wants it as much as I do—but she won't have anyone told about it yet. It sounds fantastic. I don't like it, and I don't understand her."

Mary considered him. She saw that he was worried and excited. His eyes were abnormally bright, as if he were not sleeping.

" I should have it out with her," she said, trying to keep her dislike of the girl out of her voice. " These Roxbys —I never did understand them. They're a queer lot."

Richard laughed at her. " I'm a Roxby myself," he reminded her.

Mary sat up with what dignity she could manage in the

violent swaying of the carriage. "I know that. But you're half Hansyke and Garton."

"You're a comical little body," he teased her. "I believe you think that a drop of Garton blood could work miracles."

"It's sound stock," his mother said defensively. "I've been glad enough that I was half Garton. . . . Why do you let Cynthia tell you what you must and must not do, Richard?"

He gave her a quick look. "It may be because I'm so used to being bullied by women."

"Richard!"

He laughed delightedly. "It's true, isn't it? You order me about like a child."

"I won't have you say it," she exclaimed, in a fine indignation. "I've never bullied you in my life. If Cynthia Roxby does it, it is because you let her."

Then she saw that he was jeering at his own feeling of uncertainty. "You must love her very much," she said sadly.

"I love her more, far more, than I did at first," Richard said. "And I like her less." He stared out of the carriage. "It's an odd thing, isn't it? I dislike her when she laughs at Clara. And when she is talking about her admirers. And when she speaks of the dockers she sees on the wharfs as if they were animals. And when she says in a languid voice: 'Very pleasant indeed—for persons of their class.' She's vain, selfish, and a snob."

"Why marry her?" Mary said, in a low voice, "when you think about her like that?"

She could do nothing for him. He looked at her blankly, as if he were dazed or tired to death.

"I must marry her, mother. I've gone too far." He frowned at her. "She's beautiful, isn't she? I don't know why I said all those things. They're true, but they don't matter."

In her grief his mother turned, as if for the last time, as

if he were leaving her, or as if she were dying, to fix in her mind such small details as the smoothness of his skin, the fine down over his cheekbones, and the way in which, when he was perplexed, he sat frowning, with compressed mouth and bright, impersonal eyes. He has changed already, she thought. She resented the lines which had appeared during the past month between his eyes, and the air of strain and anxiety which she saw plainly now, when he sat beside her, his slender body abandoned to the motion of the carriage. "Don't do anything you'll be sorry for," she murmured.

"I've gone too far," he repeated. His voice altered, became light and mischievous. "You needn't worry about me, my dear. I'm very happy. I promise you I can look after her. You'll see, we shall be outrageously happy together. She needs kindness, you know. Her father—he adored her—died when she was a little girl, and her mother thinks of no one but Nicholas. I shall make it up to her." He laughed, gaily and confidently.

They had reached the house. He jumped out and offered her a hand, which she ignored, and they walked across the hall arm in arm, smiling at each other like lovers.

Cynthia was alone in the drawing-room, half asleep, her bright head nodding forward, a flower on a long fine stalk. She sprang up when they came in. Her quick glance took in everything, their air of intimacy, and the almost guilty smile which for an instant changed Mary's face into that of a girl. Richard has been talking to her, she thought. How she dislikes me. She walked away from them and stood at a window, looking across the garden. I'll never come here again, she said to herself. She wished that instead of the courtesy with which Mary treated her, she had been able to complain of coldness and hostility. She turned to Mary with a friendly smile.

"How did Richard come on at the Board meeting this

morning, Mrs. Hervey ? Did he unfold his great scheme, and were you very angry and high-handed with him ? "

Mary's training had sustained her through so many worse moments. Surely, she thought ironically, this girl doesn't imagine that I shall cry because my son has been talking over my bad temper with her ? She was surprised by a sudden pity for Cynthia, seeing for a moment the uncertainty under the young woman's air of confidence.

" I was furious with him," she said frankly. " I think he's almost a fool. But I gave in. I expect to die before the revolution."

As she went out—her colour had risen in spite of her—she gave Richard an appealing glance. If only he doesn't give me away, she thought. Above all, she did not want the young woman to know that her stroke had succeeded.

He shut the door behind her and walked thoughtfully towards Cynthia. When she looked at him, she felt the same surprise and annoyance that we feel on entering a room to which we have been summoned—to find it empty. She searched his face in vain for any vestige of friendliness : he might have been the most casual of strangers. The effect lasted scarcely a moment, but she was to recall it afterwards.

" Why did you tell my mother I had been discussing my scheme with you ? " he asked wearily.

Her eyes sparkled with anger. " Is there anything wrong in that ? "

He gave her a quick loving smile. " You'd no call to do it," he said, speaking in a slow broad voice.

" Don't talk like a Yorkshire lout," she said furiously. " It isn't even your natural way of talking. I hate affectation."

" Don't you like it, then ? "

" You know I don't." She resented his pretence of what she called " commonness " so much that she invariably lost her temper when he chose to speak like a countryman—as if the mere sound of those soft broad Yorkshire

vowels irritated her beyond bearing. The truth was that she had lived, during the last few years, among people who had never heard of the Roxbys, so that she spent a great part of her time in thinking and speaking of them as a much nobler family than they were—too noble to be caught speaking like Yorkshiremen. It was only Yorkshire that she disliked. The Duke of —— talked to her like one of his own grooms, and she took it for an effect of his good breeding and imitated him, until covert smiles warned her that she was making a fool of herself.

"Never mind," Richard said lovingly. "Forgive me, and I won't do it again. Now be kind to me, Cynthy."

"You're so unreasonable. The truth is that you don't really like me. Why did you ask me to marry you? I'd have done better never to come here. Don't stare at me. I tell you you don't like me. You never did."

He was surprised—since he had already forgotten telling his mother that he scarcely liked her. When she was with him he did not notice that the voice, the laughter, which so moved him, were busy making foolish or snobbish remarks, or poking fun at poor Clarry. He saw nothing but the almost sparkling fairness of her hair, the resilience of her tall thin body, and heard only the delicious tones of the voice with which she said so little that pleased him and nothing that he admired. He put his arms round her and said: "I promise never to get over loving you, my darling. Won't that do?"

He hoped that she would forgive him and be gentle with him again, but she freed herself and went away. She meant to "teach him a lesson"—one of those phrases she had taken over, together with a sharp tongue and a way of compressing her lips, from the piously respectable family into which John Roxby had married. She believed that she had Mary to thank for what she called Richard's awkwardness. When he was unmanageable, it was because Mary had been talking against her. In this way she expressed her vague feeling that he compared her with

an image which existed already in his thoughts, and to which she did not often conform. She came nearest to it when she most forgot herself.

With her hand on the door she turned to look at him. Perhaps—if he were very unhappy—but he was no longer looking at her.

"Richard!"

"What is it?" he said patiently.

"Oh, you're intolerable," she cried, and ran from the room.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE next day was one of those light golden days that seldom travel so far north. Richard stayed away from the Works. He spent the morning reading Cowley, and in the afternoon he took Cynthia across the moor to Roxby House. The sky lifted itself above them into an immense dome, painted blue and white, in soft brilliant colours. They left the metalled road and followed a grassy ride through the heather. Parts of it were half bog, over which the horses picked their way, stepping delicately from tuft to tuft of the fine short grass, and avoiding the bright moss and the spreading patches of sundew and butterwort. Cynthia halted and pointed with her crop at the slender violet-budded flowers. She had never seen them before. Richard had to dismount and pull up a plant to show her the curling fleshy leaves, filled with clear water into which the insects it fed on fell and were drowned. "Tall and thin and lovely—like you," he said, rubbing his cheek against her arm. "And I'm drowning in you." She galloped off and left him. It was ten minutes before he came up with her on the narrow track, flushed with laughter and the breeze. He leaned over and checked her horse, so that he could turn her face round to kiss it, light sun-warmed kisses. He had the sharp taste of peat in his mouth, as sharp as new wine.

"Oh my love. I should like to ride with you like this for ever and ever."

"We should soon get very hungry," Cynthia said.

He remembered then that he had brought a square of chocolate. He sought in his pockets for it, and shared it with her. It tasted a little of leather. Cynthia made a wry face over it, but she ate her share and part of his. Afterwards he moistened his handkerchief and wiped the

smear of chocolate from the corners of her mouth. "Horrid little girl," he said, and worked away, frowning. His eyes danced. "How I love you," he cried.

The moor fell away to the barren acres of grassland round Roxby House. Seen from above, the great place flattened itself against the ground, as if it were driving its roots into the earth to avoid being torn up and swept away by the wind. It crouched below the edge of the moor, a long grey wolf of a house. Its three acres of tiled roof were stained by a fine lichen to the colour of the walls, the colour of sunless water, turning peat-black on the weather side. When they had brought their horses round to the front, it was impressive enough, with an immense reserve and dignity in the thick walls, narrow windows, and heavy stone mouldings. Three great wings enclosed the first courtyard, and behind them, through an arch from which the gate had rotted, was a lawn, very smooth and fine, with another wing of the house on either side and an old wall that cut if off from the gardens beyond.

"You never told me you had a house this size," Cynthia murmured.

"Not more than ten rooms are habitable."

He led her through into the courtyard, and gave their horses over to Jackson, the working bailiff. Cynthia eyed the man curiously. He talked to their horses in a quick ingratiating fashion, *whishing* between his teeth, but he did not look at her or at Richard. He was not hostile to the human beings, he was indifferent. He reminded her of a powerful little horse she had once had, a thoroughbred animal, full of quality, but of so uncertain a temper that he became unmanageable and had to be shot. She had cried every night for a week; she had liked him so much and he had always behaved himself for her. His eyes, black and restless, with a warning gleam in their pupils, were the spit image of the man's. When the man had gone, walking with a short powerful stride between the horses, she spoke to Richard about him.

" Jackson is a character," Richard said lightly. " He ran away from his wife five years ago, with a girl from the village. His wife's brother went after the couple and brought him back. A year later he ran away again, alone. This time he came back to her of his own accord, said to be dying. His wife nursed him and he recovered. He's been here ever since. She says he hardly speaks to her : sometimes for weeks he doesn't open his mouth except to put food into it. The house is six miles from Roxborough, so she must lead a rare solitary life during those weeks. He sleeps in the stable, except when it's too cold for him. Then, I suppose, he sleeps with his wife, since they have only one bed. Once a year he gets crazy drunk and beats her, or makes love to her ; I'm not sure which."

" Why does she stay with him ? He must be mad."

Richard looked at her with an ironical smile. " She loves him. She can't or won't let him go. I believe he detests her, and he can't cure himself of her—and there you have it in a nutshell. If you can call Roxby House a nutshell."

" Then she is mad," Cynthia exclaimed. " It shocks me."

Richard jerked his shoulders. " Judge her for yourself," he said carelessly. " Here she is."

Mrs. Jackson came across the flagged yard with a quick airy gait, like a leaf in a light breeze. She was as brown and delicate as a leaf. She walked with her thin face lifted, as if she were avid of the air. She seemed to drink it in as she moved. By the time she reached Cynthia and Richard her eyes were dancing in her head and her cheeks flushed under their brown. She was overjoyed to see them. She took the girl into the house, and brought her hot water, and a worn old towel woven with the Roxby arms. There were five hundred of them, she told her, woven for old George Roxby by a small mill in the West Riding, lying mildewed in one of the linen rooms.

" I can't keep up with things," she said, sighing. " I work all day—but what with mending and cooking for Jackson, and looking after my flowers, and keeping Mr. Richard's rooms right, I can't do much to the rest of the house. It would swallow up fifty women and tens of thousands of pounds." She flitted across the room to the window. " Did Jackson take your horses ? "

" Yes."

" He's clever with horses," his wife said. " He was brought up among them. His father was trainer to a very good stable. He wanted his son to better himself, and he sent him away to school. He got on very well there, too." She sighed. " You'd wonder a man of his intelligence could live here like this, wouldn't you, with only country people and horses to talk to ? We see no one else. But it's what he wishes. He can't endure towns and townspeople. They send him beside himself with fretting. He's not a man everyone would understand." She gave Cynthia a sidelong glance. " You'll excuse me for talking so much. We're a bit lonely here."

On a sudden impulse of liking, Cynthia walked over to the window. She stood there looking over the woman's shoulder. The lawn drowsed in the sun, inconceivably smooth and green, a gauntlet flung in the teeth of the moor. Jackson appeared suddenly at the far corner, walking quickly, with his nervous stride.

" Did he speak to you ? " Mrs. Jackson murmured.

" No."

" He wouldn't," his wife said simply. " He isn't speaking just now." She looked after him with a strange shy pride. She's jealous of everyone, Cynthia thought. She turned away, angry that she was included in Mrs. Jackson's thoughts of her husband. Mrs. Jackson's face wore a delicate humorous smile. She appeared to be laughing at herself, Jackson, the young girl, and her own unmanageable longings. Cynthia felt to her horror that this extraordinary smile was reflected in her own face.

It grew and broadened there. The two women looked at each other, confused, on the verge of laughter. "Sometimes he loses himself and beats me," Mrs. Jackson murmured.

Cynthia blushed. "I must hurry," she stammered. "Mr. Roxby will be wondering." She turned and ran from the room.

Richard was waiting impatiently at the foot of the stairs. She came down quickly, holding the skirt of her habit. With the shutting of a door between herself and Mrs. Jackson, her smile faded: she restrained an impulse to throw herself into Richard's arms. His quick friendly glance gave her a shock of pleasure. She ran down the last stairs and took hold of him. "Show me everything, everything," she cried.

He took her over the house, from room to room. She lifted the sheets from mildewed furniture and poked her fingers through the fine rotted fabric of uncounted curtains and hangings—curtains that were no longer counted, since Sarah Roxby, who had known exactly how many curtains she had possessed, was dead. The neglect was dreadful. They had walked for an hour and seen less than half the rooms when he asked her if she were tired.

"No, no," she answered quickly. "I want to see it."

She liked to walk beside him, to feel his fingers on her waist, to watch his absorbed eager face. He was hardly conscious of her. He walked on so quickly that she had difficulty in keeping up with him. Her habit bothered her, and once she stumbled. He swung round. "You're tired. I've tired you."

"No, no." She bit her lip. She was almost in tears.

"You are tired." He stood looking at her with an odd mingling of impatience and love. She averted her face, ashamed. "You poor child. Poor, sweet child. What a fool I am. I'll carry you." His voice was

gentle. He carried her almost the whole length of a gallery, swaying under her weight.

"Please let me walk," she implored him. He sat down on a low window-seat, and cherished her in his arms. He stroked her face and soothed her. She lay back with closed eyes, delighting in him. He was very gentle with her.

"How perfectly you suit my arm," he murmured. "It's uncommonly convenient."

She roused herself, reluctant to move. She shrank from telling him what she thought of his house. "Shall we live here?" she asked.

"Of course. It's the Roxby house. My mother will put it in order for us. Don't you like it?" He spoke in a young confident voice.

She could not bear the house. She looked through the window and saw the moor. It lay black and lifeless in the hot sun. The sky sprang clean away from it, disliking and denying it. She would not believe that it was quick with streams, that its dark earth was the receptacle and warm hive of hot August noons, heavy with the dusty heather scent and murmurous with bees. I might as well live in a desert, she thought. She felt its unfriendliness, its relentless cold indifference: it had never been lived in and tamed to human uses. It frightened her and made her cringe. She thought with affection of her aunt's house and of the solemn bustle of Pall Mall, onto which it looked: she had never liked London, but at worst it was human and warmed.

"Will that man and his wife live here then?" she asked.

"The Jacksons? I could hardly turn them away."

This was too much. The memory of Mrs. Jackson's smile was too much. She felt that she could not breathe in the house, with the knowledge that those two were living in it, locked in their silent struggle, from which neither would escape alive. The thought oppressed her to the verge of suffocation. She slipped from Richard's

knee and pushed open a window. The moor was less alarming than the Jacksons.

"I couldn't have them about," she said decisively.

Richard laughed. "You would never see them."

"I should feel them," she said, stubborn and hurt.

Richard smiled at her through his lashes. His face was soft and mischievous. He stretched himself lazily, warm and relaxed after his ride. Wild boisterous laughter simmered in him, waiting to be released. Only, if he released it, it would never stop. It would break out of him like a sheet of flame, devouring himself and Cynthia in one splendid intolerable moment. What fun! His throat ached with the suppressed laughter. He could have stifled it against Cynthia if she had not moved away. He sat up, a little sobered, and glanced at her averted face. "I won't let you be unhappy here," he promised. It had not been an unhappy house; not all the Roxbys had been so solemn and decorous as Archie, whose portrait he had refrained from pointing out to her—he wondered how on earth his mother had endured the fellow. "Oh Cynthia, Cynthia," he said wonderingly. "How fair you are—*fair and fair and twice as fair*."

She did not look at him. "You're an absurd child," he said, in a warm teasing voice, and pulled her lazily against his shoulder. She freed herself and walked away. He stood looking after her with a smile. She walked to the end of the gallery and tried the door. It was locked. She had to come back to him.

"I won't show you any more now," he said gently. He took her downstairs and out into the neglected gardens. She sat in the sun with a drowsy contented air, thinking how best to get her own way. Mrs. Jackson's ironic smile flowered behind her eyes, like the slow subtle folding back of petals to show the strange heart. Surely—if that woman had found a way to keep a husband who disliked her, Cynthia Roxby could find ways and means to keep her lover.

Richard talked to her about his Roxbys, and hers. "Your grandfather was the youngest of five brothers. My mother married the second brother. She was fifteen—can you imagine what it must have been for her to come to this house as the wife of that stiff solemn bred-out old gentleman? The house itself was a bedlam. George Roxby, the eldest, was immensely fat, so fat that he had to be braced into steel stays before he could get out of bed. His groans, while his man adjusted buckles and straps with as much care as if he were a fashionable beauty, filled the house. His wife, Sarah Roxby, kept a large family of monkeys: he told my mother that on their marriage night he never got near her for them. One winter they caught some sort of epidemic, and my mother and Sarah nursed them: she says they sat round wrapped in flannel and blankets, chattering; it reminded her of nothing except the pool of Bethesda. When my father died, George begged her to strengthen her position in the family by marrying his son; but the second George brought an ugly old mistress home with him whom he wouldn't turn off. He was the heir. He died immediately after his father, and my mother had to fight the remaining Roxbys for my inheritance. Think of her—the gallant young creature—arguing with those old men, beating them down."

Cynthia listened coldly. Always his mother—it was inexplicably galling to her.

"She was sixteen when I was born. She used to play on that lawn with me." He gave her a shy sidelong glance. "I suppose the age she was then explains why I can never think of her as much older than myself. Sixteen years isn't very many: not more than between some brothers and sisters. We were two against the world for so long—until she married again."

He recalled an incident which he kept to himself: one night—it was the night of his sixth birthday, too—he had wakened in his bed in Mark Henry Garton's house, to

find her kneeling beside it, her head in his pillow. He thought she was crying, and his heart stood still. "What is it?" he said, in terror of the night and her tears. Something shone in her eyes when she looked at him—tears or laughter?—he couldn't be sure. "I'm so shabby," she whispered. He considered her. "Then buy clothes," he said, struck by the simplicity of his solution. Now she was certainly laughing at him. "I haven't any pennies," she said in his ear: "go to sleep." "I have a new one," he said drowsily. He fell asleep, holding firmly to her hand. In the morning he had given her his penny: this time it was plainly tears—not the effect he had hoped to produce, and, he thought, needless and disconcerting.

"I suppose you were jealous of your step-father," Cynthia said maliciously.

Richard smiled subtly. "Never."

She did not believe him. She said nothing.

"I knew her better than he did."

She half lay, half sat on the grass beside him. "You must be very warm in that habit," he said: he laid a finger on her flushed cheek.

"I have hardly anything under it," Cynthia said. She took his hands and laid them on her breast and her waist. A flame passed over his body. He held her lightly between his hands, waiting for it to die in him. Cynthia opened her arms and drew him between them. He lay there, passive and almost indifferent to her: his mind withdrew to its reserve positions, leaving his body almost done for and defenceless.

He came back to life with a shock of delight, aware—with a new sharpness—of the intense blue of the sky, veiled by fine ripples of heat, and the warmth of the grass under his hand. He was aware in the same instant of everything between them: the colours of moor and garden glowed for him as if freshly painted in bright separate strokes—so that to the end of his days he remem-

bered a gilly-flower, striped and splashed with clear scarlet, that leaned over and nodded at him ; and he heard at one and the same moment a train running through the valley eight miles away, and the infinitely faint shiver of blade on blade as the grass stirred in the earth.

He was very comfortable. He pretended not to know that Cynthia had spoken to him. "How many predecessors have I had ?" she repeated.

"None." He sat up and looked her over. "None of your quality. None I remember. I should have married some red-cheeked, bouncing woman years ago if my mother had not made her look even more awkward than she was."

"Ah!" Cynthia said sharply. "I *can't* live here. This country—the ugly town—the ironmasters and their vulgar noisy wives. I couldn't stand them. Richard, you must think of me a little." She hesitated and said bitterly : "I've never lived among such people. I should die of boredom. This moor freezes me—and your house——"

"It's the Roxby house," Richard said quickly. "Your grandfather lived in it."

"I'm not my grandfather," Cynthia cried. "Do you never think of anyone except your—grandmother ? Think of me. Richard !"

He sat with bent shoulders, digging with his heel at the grass. "I think of you all the time," he said. "I couldn't live away from here, you know. The Works are mine, they'll come to me when my mother is too old to trouble with them any more."

"She'll never be too old," Cynthia said hardily. "How much part does she allow you in them ? None."

"They're mine," Richard said : he looked at her with a small contemptuous smile. "I daresay I could persuade my mother to start a London office, but I won't. She would be too cruelly disappointed."

"You don't mind disappointing me," Cynthia said, in a low voice.

He turned to her with a new gentleness. "Oh my love. Don't hurt me."

Didn't he care whether she was hurt or not? She jumped up and stood, like a tall dark-sheathed flower in the bright light. The sun was now far past his meridian: his rays, overshooting the valley, lay in thick yellow swathes on the garden and the moor. The moment warned Richard. "Look closely, you will never see my like." And this, too, he remembered at the end of his life, when he forgot things and persons much nearer to him—the fair, habited girl, standing in the peonies and tall weeds of the neglected garden, and the dun moor behind.

She said she would like to see the rest of the house: she walked beside him, graceful and reconciled, and, he thought, happy. Does he imagine I didn't mean everything I said? she wondered scornfully. She was surprised and resentful.

Mrs. Jackson had laid supper for them in Richard's sitting-room: a chicken roasted with tiny herb sausages, a vast dish of ham and eggs, an almond flummery of the colour and texture of blown foam, and hot turf cakes, tasting of the peat fire on which they had been baked. The south-west wind—which in this corner of England is velvety and caressing even at its most boisterous—blew gently, filling the room with a mingled scent of hawthorn and peat smoke.

Richard ate like a schoolboy, looking at Cynthia with so much love and delight that she felt, almost with despair, her anger fading and dissolving: and not only her anger against him, but her bones seemed dissolving. She began to realise too that—though the man she loved was not the one sitting opposite her, but a person created by herself, on whom she had bestowed a dozen amiable and biddable qualities which the real Richard, whom she did not know and to whom she was a stranger, had never possessed—she was unable to free herself of him. She did not want to be free. She wanted to possess him, by any means: let him

turn out as aloof and intractable as her worst suspicions of that unknown man, she could not now—so far had she come, unwillingly—imagine her life without him.

Yet she would not take him on his terms. Stubbornly and warily, her will asserted itself against him. She would not give in to him. He has had his own way too long, she thought coldly: it is time he learned. The lesson was difficult, even for her. It would be pleasanter to let herself drift, to accept him, as he was. If what he was had been less humbling to her pride, if he were not always, in his heart, comparing her with his mother—the mere thought of Mary hardened her against him. All at once she determined to go back to London. She had already stayed longer than she meant, and away from him, away from the enchantments of his voice and smile, she would find it easier to deal with him.

Smiling and excited, she glanced at him across the table. Ah!—if he would only be reasonable, how happy, how kind to him and loving, she would be.

They rode home slowly: it was dark when they crossed the last stretch of the moors, the luminous darkness of early June. They dismounted at the crest of the hill, and Richard led their horses down the steep lane to the house. Cynthia walked beside him in silence, half stumbling from fatigue. Richard halted and made her lean against him. He scarcely touched her, and yet he was awake to her in the very nerves of his body. His body was conscious of other things at the same time, of the dark leap of the sky, of the trees breathing beside him in the darkness, of the silent fields. His spirit flowed out into them and returned, to draw itself into one exquisite point of consciousness. He knew that in no moment of his life before had he been so sharply alive. And yet he felt sad, as if he were leaving her.

"Are you happy?" he asked her humbly.

She was looking past him at the sky over the Tees, lit fitfully by the breath of the furnaces. She caught him by

the shoulder, and with a strength surprising from her hand, swung him round: "There, look at it," she said in a suppressed voice. "One can't get away from it—that place. Richard, give it up. You must. I couldn't possibly live here."

He stood beside her in the darkness, and in silence, the hand that had supported her thrust into his pocket. Though the sky was light and dappled with soft clouds—to look up at it was like looking through a lilac tree in full flower—the lane was filled to the top of its hedges with velvety blackness. She could not see his face. She waited, shaking and expectant.

He moved at last and laid his arm across her shoulder. "We must go," he said sadly. "Come, my sweet." He helped her down the hill, moving heavily beside her. She felt his heaviness; angry and humiliated, she drew herself away from him. The hedge on their left became a stable wall. He fumbled at the gate into the yard and led the horses through. Then he took her past the kitchen garden to a side door of the house. "Don't be too angry with me," he said, in a low voice.

"I'm tired. I shall go straight to bed," she whispered. "Will you tell your mother?" She slipped past him.

He went upstairs, tore off his clothes and ran himself a bath, where he lay, in that delicious suspension of the mind and senses which follows bodily fatigue. Drugged by its warmth, he dressed slowly; then he went downstairs, avoiding his mother, and out of the house. The ground was covered with a heavy dew; he thought he had never felt it so cool on his face and hands. He lay still, his mind an empty room across which his thoughts moved like shadows; they followed each other, soft-footed and meaningless, like the shadows thrown by passers-by into a room lit only by the gas lamp outside the window.

He was thinking of what, as a boy, he had meant to do with his life—to know men and cities, to live so that mind and body were a stretched bow, taut for release. He had

done nothing. He had hardly left Middlesbrough, held there by a passion for ships and Garton's which was not even his own passion. It was his mother's, which he had accepted from her. Her will spoke with his voice, thought with his mind and used his hand on the plans and sketches and specifications with which unceasingly he was busied. His very delight in the work had been hers—borrowed from her : its flight left him stripped.

" It's not of the least importance," he said politely, aloud, seizing instinctively, to hide from himself the depths of a resentment and an anguish he would never acknowledge, on the phrase he might use to a man who upset a glass of wine over him at dinner. " So long as she's had what she wanted, bless her." He supposed she must have had that—since the day she got her ships.

He felt a profound contempt for people who did nothing —like George Ling's son, who had taught himself the life of a gentleman and was now marrying into what he called the proper class ; or like George Ling himself, who lived to make money.

He turned on his back and lay face upwards, staring at the sky: it was like looking into layer after layer of pure light, each one dissolving with the imperceptible movement of ripples in clear water into the one beyond. His head reeled. He pressed his hands against the ground, and began to think of the two women who loved him. He thought he knew what they wanted. Cynthia wanted an adoring lover, whose life fitted smoothly into her own. His mother wanted him to be strong and clever—a proper person to carry on Garton's when she died. She was anxious for his happiness too : she had worked and planned for it, and though she disliked Cynthia she would accept her cheerfully, because he wanted her.

He felt a sudden sharp wish to get away, to escape for a time from the pressure of his mother's will, and the strain of her warm, deep love, enclosing him on every side. But—if he went away—would he ever bring himself to return ?

He thought of Cynthia with grief and longing. Why would she not take him as he was, and for what he was ? Yet what am I ? he thought ironically. Why should she be satisfied with me—a man who has nothing of his own ? But he longed sharply for her to take him, to accept responsibility for him, for the uncertainty and nakedness of his spirit : and to ask no questions.

He saw the light go out in his mother's room, and—soaked to the skin now—he got up and went in. He had halted to look through a landing window when he heard the door of Cynthia's room opening carefully. She called him in a low voice. He went back.

" Come in. I can't talk to you in the passage," she said.

The only light in the room was the lamp near her bed, but he saw that she was pale. He leaned against the wall.

" Why aren't you asleep ? "

" I couldn't sleep without seeing you," she said. " I wanted you to know—I am sorry—I understand about the Works and your mother—you must have patience with me. You must wait."

He looked at her for a long time, at her bright hair and thin arms. " What do you want me to do ? " he said. " You know I want to marry you. How long am I to wait ? "

She said nothing. He could read what he chose into her face, and he chose to read irony and an evasive smile. " How long must I wait ? " he repeated heavily. What a ridiculous figure he cut ! His heart was hot against her.

" Ah, Richard ! " She stood in front of him, with a disarming delicate air. " Don't go away angry. I should be so unhappy."

" Well, at least I must go," he murmured. His anger sank as it had risen, swiftly and suddenly. " Good-night, my dear, my love."

She stood quietly in his arms. " Don't go."

" I must go. You ought to be asleep."

" I can sleep afterwards."

" Afterwards ? " he repeated gently.

" After this. Oh, Richard, what a child you are ! It's as I thought. My dear."

He was very deliberate, handling her gently. It surprised him that he never lost the sense of his identity, penetrated as he was by pleasure. He plunged into a swiftly running stream, like the stream below Roxby House, in which he bathed on warm evenings. The water closed over his head, and yet he could lift his eyelids against it and feel the smoothness and coolness of his limbs. He came into the air with a shock of delight.

He looked down at her. Shading her eyes with his hand, he saw himself reflected in them : it might have been Mary's face he saw there—so like hers was it. Cynthia stirred under his scrutiny and he laid his hand lightly on her breast : why had she nothing to say ? But she lay there in silence, filled with an exquisite languor : her only conscious feeling was one of triumph ; she felt that she had triumphed over Richard's mother in the body of her son. She glanced at him with a shy warm smile. Now I am safe, she thought happily.

Richard left her and went back to his room. He fell asleep and slept dreamlessly. He woke an hour later in the grey twilight of early morning, and heard, between sleeping and waking, the faint crying of a bird—three thin clear notes. The sharp intolerable sweetness of the cry struck to his heart. It is, he thought, the most poignant of all sounds, the first heard by sick persons as they lie awake, longing for the night to be over and for someone to come to them and break the dreadful heaviness in which they lie ; it restores and reassures them and recalls to them nights when they could not sleep for happiness : the sound that reminds lovers of the day, and comforts a mother watching her child ; she rises and goes to the window, thankful that another night is passed and another day at hand to strengthen the flickering life.

To die, and never hear it again—it was bitter, bitter. He thought strangely of a man waking from the dead : he would wake alone, in some such grey light and hear, with ears not yet conscious of immortality, the triple crying of a bird.

The light strengthened in the room and pressed on his eyes. He turned on his side and slept. Time relented a little, and in his sleep he was a child, dreaming in Mark Henry Garton's house above the old shipyard.

CHAPTER SIX

IN every life there fall, at one time or again, days and moments of illumination: the mind opens, the perceptions are sharpened, a thought that has been lying in the hidden places springs suddenly into the light and becomes a familiar possession—the past explains itself and the present takes on a new shape, and a thousand things that were obscure or unrecognised become blindingly clear. Like a Syrian plain, which is one day as bare as if all seed had withered and the next radiant with spring, the mind flowers and is aware of what it has nourished in darkness.

These moments do not change the course of a life so much as reveal it. Mary Hervey accepted the knowledge that she had made a fool of herself as if it were what she had always known and expected. She was like a traveller who, stumbling all night along a strange path, is caught by the dawn upon some hill-top and sees in that moment his road clear before him and behind him. She stood in the window of her room with idle hands, unable, for the first time in her life, to plan and manage.

Now she wanted Hugh, not as young Mary Roxby had wanted him, to complete her life and love and admire her, but because without him her life meant nothing. It was senseless and savourless. I've been a fool, she thought. I could have kept him. I let him go. I fell in love with Gerry Hardman and almost ran away with him. My poor Gerry. Her heart contracted with pain—for a ghost, a tired ghost. She would have liked to know that he was happy and to comfort him if he were not. It had meant, at the time, everything—and it was finished. If she had been able to keep Hugh, it would not have begun. She knew that, too.

"There's nothing I can do," she exclaimed. She

scarcely believed that. It went too hardly against the grain to think that she was helpless, that she could not even try for what she wanted so cruelly. She could even laugh at herself—but she was restless and uncertain. She started up to look for Hugh, inventing as she went an excuse for disturbing his work. At the door of the library another impulse turned her back. She hurried away and ordered the carriage to take her into Middlesbrough. She must work. I couldn't work much harder, she thought. I work twice as hard as Mark Henry did. She hoped sincerely that wherever Mark Henry had betaken himself in the next world, she would be able to find him and tell him what she had made of his shipyard.

Towards noon she walked across to the Yard. To reach the testing-house, where she was going, she had to walk through the great yard into which the iron plates and bars were delivered by overhead cranes from the railway. The dinner whistle had gone and groups of ironworkers stood about in the blazing sun. They took no notice of her. There was no touching of caps. Such glances as she got were cold and inimical. She was equally detached. For all she saw of them, the men and their glances might not have been there. She neither knew nor cared what they thought of her. Such signs of her unpopularity as came her way she forgot as quickly as possible. She would not have understood their feeling. So long as she did her duty by them—ran the firm well, paid a fair wage—what business had they to feel anything about her? She said she found it difficult to believe that they did.

She found the man she wanted in the physical laboratory. He was eating an apple and flicking the pips at the Yard cat. When he saw her he jumped up and offered her one of his apples, obligingly polishing it for her on his sleeve. She took it and sat down.

"Well, Mr. Forbes?"

"Well, ma'am?"

Forbes was a Danesacre man, whom she had put in charge of the firm's experimental work against the advice of every other shipbuilder in the district. He drank, he had been in prison for bigamy, he was known as a blasphemer and believed to be a Socialist. Mary was not alarmed by the bigamy, but she told him bluntly that blasphemy was more than she could stand. "I'll cut me tongue out," he said earnestly. The men called him a beggar for work. He worked more like a madman. The night watchman saw him crossing the Yard after midnight, singing hoarsely, his long body bent with fatigue. One night he walked in an ecstasy into the graving dock, and was fished out cold and sober, with most of his ribs broken, in the morning. He was back at work within a week, cased in plaster of paris. After that night, he carried a lantern. He had a fancy for wandering about the Yard in the early morning, admiring the big hydraulic rams and the slender shadows thrown by girders and cranes. The size of the place intoxicated him. His footsteps echoed in empty lofts and shops. He ran his hand caressingly over sheet-iron and timber, talking to the machinery as if it were alive. The watchman swore that he had caught him saying his prayers to the big riveting machine in the boiler shop. It is possible.

He liked Mary, and she responded with the bluff frankness she had learned from Mark Henry Garton.

"I'm told there's trouble in the platers' sheds, Mr. Forbes."

"What d'y'expect?" Forbes grunted. "Why shouldn't there be trouble?"

She could not ask him directly for information. Suddenly she began to talk to him about Danesacre and the old Garton Yard. "I was happier there," she said. "This place is too big—it isn't mine. Thirty-five acres of Yard and Works. It's more than I can like."

"You put it up yourself," he said callously. "It's what you wanted." He was not interested in Danesacre

and the old Yard. He told her so. "You've begun to look back. You're getting old—that's what's wrong with you. Wishing you was young again." He wagged his head. "*I* know."

"I don't feel old," she said mildly.

"You're past the turn," he said remorselessly. "Tide's running out again. I'll be bound you don't dream of your ships now."

"Dreams don't signify," Mary said.

He chuckled alarmingly. "Nothing else signifies. Nothing else, nothing else, nothing else. What I dream to-day lives to-morrow. I make men with my dreams. Nothing's done except by dreaming it. I'm telling you. By God, when I stop dreaming I'll cut me throat and have done."

"Take care," Mary said abruptly. "One of these days your dreams will make a meal of you. And then what becomes of you—and them? There are such things as bad dreams, Mr. Forbes."

"I can tell you what's wrong with you," he exclaimed. "When you was a young woman working for that ruffian Mark Henry Garton you followed every one of his ships out of harbour. There was you, walking on the water—if you'll excuse me for putting it like that—and there was th'ship. All *you* saw of her was a vanishing hull. Now they're your own they're a burden on you. You're a restless uncomfortable body, ma'am, who's got her own way. No wonder you're wishing you was a girl again, in Mark Henry's little Yard. Nowt's keeping you going now but obstinacy and dislike. That's what your love's turned to—hate and obstinacy. You'll build more ships than th'other fellow and keep your men down—that's you now."

Mary looked at him bleakly. "I hear you give all your money to the men's Unions," she said.

He laughed at her. "What if I do?" he said boisterously. "Tell me that, woman. What if I do?"

" I might get rid of you," she told him coolly.

He squinnied at her round his long nose. " You can't do without me."

" I don't want to," she said frankly. " If you'll only behave yourself a little."

" You're a nice one," he grumbled. " Trust a woman to show no gratitude. I've purified meself soul and body until I'm a shadow of what I was—and you ain't satisfied. You ain't even pleased. Lumme ! "

Her mouth twitched. " So I've hurt your feelings, have I ? " she said drily. " Well—ask me for another rise, and see whether you get it. That's all. I'll not supply your wretched Unions with any more money through *your* pockets."

" Just as you like," he said airily. " When I want more I'll go where I can get it."

" Go, then," Mary jeered. " Who'll employ you, I'd like to know ! "

His face worked. " By God, ma'am," he burst out, " I'd like you to live for a week in a docker's cottage. That 'ud teach you what it's like to be born in dirt and nursed in want. When I think "—his voice cracked suddenly—" when I think of childer wanting bread, wanting air, I could drown England in tears and blood. Here's something—what would you feel if you could only keep that great house of yourn by having a half-starved child shut up in it somewheres ? You'd keep out of sight and sound of it, wouldn't you ? Your stomach 'ud turn in you when you remembered it ? And because it's not one but a million childer—you don't give it a thought. Eh, it's a vile world."

" I didn't make it," Mary said wearily. He was mad, of course. She was not comfortable about the dock quarter —but things were no worse than they had always been, when trade was bad. " The men didn't look at me as I came through the yard," she said irrelevantly.

Forbes had quieted down. " You needn't mind that,"

he assured her. His eyes twinkled. "They'll like you well enough when you're dead. In thirty years' time you'll be a grand monument. Not that you'll be dead then," he added hastily. "All the same, you'll be a monument. When you're an old woman—they'll think no end of you. *I* shall be dead. I shall die of me kidneys."

He escorted her to the Yard gates and watched her disappear round the corner of the Engine Works, a straight active little figure, hurrying along with an air of eagerness and dignity. Turning back into the Yard, he kicked a man cheerfully for using on her a term he had used himself before now. "Eh you——" he said amiably. "Keep you dirty water to yourself, can't you? I've half a mind to drop you into th'wet basin. She's a rare spirited woman—I'm telling you now." . . .

Mary walked back to the office through streets from which the pitiless sun drew an unimaginable town smell, tarry, sweaty, coal-dusty. She was hardly in her room, thankful for its cool quiet, when a clerk brought a message that Captain Russell had waited an hour on the chance of speaking to her. He came in, very friendly and at his ease, and sat down at the other side of her desk.

She smiled at him. "Well, captain, any news for me?"

"Well, ma'am," he began affably, "it's like this. I thought it was you had suggested I should show Miss Sylvia round the *Savannah*, and now Mrs. James comes on board last night, interfering as usual, sniffs round my cabin, and says: 'You'd no call to do it, and if she was my girl, you'd lose your ship.' That was a pleasant young fellow, too, Miss Sylvia had with her—wouldn't drink port—seemed very sensible." His blue eyes, child-like and candid in their weathered sockets, grew vague. "Nothing but respect was meant, ma'am. Why, I've had ladies on board the *Savannah*—the agent at Odessa always brings his wife on board. She doesn't speak a

word of English and laughs—ha, I never heard anybody laugh so. Hardly eats anything—only what the steward can manage very well. You won't find anything *wasted* in the *Savannah*, ma'am. Queer women, them Rooshians. Excitatable, you might say." He seemed a little doubtful of the word himself.

"You can set your mind at rest," Mary said promptly. "Miss Sylvia enjoyed herself very well."

She shook hands with him, encountering—with a slight shock—a glance so shrewd that it was almost sly. In the same moment she wondered how on earth he could have persuaded himself that anyone else had suggested the visit to the *Savannah*. Sylvia had distinctly said that Captain Russell suggested it himself—and she never lied.

"Yes," he said heartily. "Ha—yes. She did. She enjoyed herself."

It occurred to her—as the door shut behind him—that Captain Russell was less simple-minded than he had always seemed. He was a good master, with a distressing habit of wearing his uniforms until they dropped off him. The one he had on now was new. Its elegance set him off very well—and he was a handsome fellow. She had heard that he read books, was hard on his men, and not above tricking other masters. Well, he knew how to navigate a ship—he had never had an accident. She dismissed him from her mind.

She was far from unhappy. As she drove home, her spirits rose with startling suddenness : she was like Mark Henry in her sudden changes of note. She had the gambler's certitude of her luck and her moment, which no sad experience could teach her to distrust. Everything was going well. Sylvia was docile, Richard all that a son—and the heir to Garton's—should be ; as for Hugh—she sighed, and surrendered herself to an unreasonable excitement. It was impossible to believe that she had no husband, that nothing marvellous was on the

point of happening. It was, it must be—she felt it. She hung on the edge of expectation, eager, humble, happier than she had ever been. She was strangely content. It was something that she knew now what she wanted, even if she did not get it.

She met Hugh in the hall. "You're very late," he said, in a disappointed voice. "They brought your horse over this morning. I wanted you to try him. If you don't like him I shall be surprised, and annoyed." He hurried her round to the stables to see the horse he had bought for her a week ago—a grey, nearly white, with a head a good deal like an Arab. "I'Anson would have it he was too hot for you, but I'm certain you can ride him. When will you try him ?"

"After dinner," Mary murmured. She went up to her room and sat down, suddenly tired. Clara, coming in half an hour later, found her sunk and crumpled,sleeping in her chair, and began to creep away. A puff of wind, snatching the door from her fingers, slammed it after her. Panic-stricken, she opened it again.

"I'm so sorry, mother."

"It's all right," Mary said, yawning. "Did you fall ? You'll stumble over the edge of your own grave, Clarry. Go away now, I must dress." When the girl had gone, her conscience pricked her. She was ashamed of her impatience with this best and kindest of her children.

The sun was low in the sky when she followed Hugh along the road to the valley. Rooks were settling down in the three great elms at the bend of the road, and a noisy quarrelsome set of fellows they were. Chestnuts in full bloom, and the creamy pyramids of white lilac, stretched over the vicarage wall. Hugh turned out of the village to the bridle path beside the stream. It lay half in shadow, a limpid no-colour, faintly tinged by the mellow evening light. Where, in a wider stiller reach, the sun lay thoughtfully, small roach darted from stone to stone under the bank.

" How d'you like him ? " he demanded.

Mary's wrists ached and throbbed. " Very much." She rode well, better than her daughters—she sat on her horse with ease, grace, and courage—but she was tired out. She kept on grimly, determined not to show weakness. Getting old, was she ? She set her teeth, and galloped after Hugh, the slender powerful horse pulling at her shoulders. Would Hugh never turn home ? When he did, bringing her round in a wide detour to the back of the stables, she fell off her horse into his arms. Her exhaustion alarmed him. He followed her up to her room, shocked and angry. " You're overdoing things," he said furiously.

She rallied at once. " Don't go, Hugh. I don't want to rest. I want you to talk to me." She looked at him doubtfully, longing to touch him, and afraid. He was smiling, but his smile said plainly: " Don't come too near." It was not going to be easy for her. She saw that.

" What shall I talk to you about, then ? " he said, softly and ironically.

" Tell me whether you're happy."

" Of course I'm happy. Why shouldn't I be ? " He saw that she was disappointed. His smile broadened. " I haven't said what you wanted me to."

She trembled. " Don't be unkind, Hugh."

" Am I unkind ? " He stood over her, still smiling. " Am I unkind, Mary ? What am I to do with you ? Tell me."

" Nay, how can I tell you ? " she asked him sadly. " You'll do as you like."

" I'd like to please you," he said sweetly.

And pray what possible objection could there be to that ? Why, none—except that it was not true. He refused to take on himself any responsibility for their life together. Neither pride nor diffidence hindered him, but a more profound instinct—to turn his back on life. He had missed so much, he would miss the rest, and be damned to it.

"You're the best woman in the world, Mary," he said suddenly.

He understand her better now—her simplicity, with its strange tortuous undercurrent; her courage, her generosity, and the mingling of recklessness and patience, humility, pride, stupidity, which made up that baffling spirit. He understood, too, the vein of hardness running through it. It was that which shaped her, on which she had built her life.

He was no longer what is called in love with her—a term which at once suggests that one may shortly be out again. But he was bound to her in an intimacy which nothing—years nor estrangement—could destroy between them. His unfaithfulness had not destroyed it. It persisted, a gentleness whose remembered face no stroke of time or anger could wholly mar.

He looked at her. Small, timid, tense with the effort of her will, she stared back at him. He could not deny her except by denying a part of his own life. It seemed, on the whole, the easiest thing to do. He had run away from her before, when they were both young: it was too late now, he was too tired, to begin over again the struggle between her will and his. Yet he felt a horrible wrench and sickness in his body as he moved away from her.

She said nothing, afraid of making matters worse. She knew that he was leaving her, and she felt only pity for him. Why would he not be comforted? Why was he so foolish? Couldn't he see that all the fine sentiments she had once had for him had long since withered and dropped off? Nothing remained between them but what was real. She had no will to fight him now. He might go off with a dozen Fanny Jardines, and she would only laugh and wait for him to come back. She thought with surprise, so distant from us and estranged are our past selves, of that girl who had cried night after night for a year because her husband had taken a fancy to another woman. For that was how she translated to her-

self, in order to be able to understand it, an event which had caused her younger self so much pain and altered the whole course of her life.

" Don't go," she said longingly.

But this is worse than all, he thought, bitterly ashamed. " You'd better let me go, Mary. I'm no use to you."

" Ah, but listen, Hugh." The colour had come back to her face. She was smiling and eager. " I want you to know—I understand now how wrong it is to arrange another person's life. I tried to arrange yours. You were to come and live in Danesacre with me as my lover, and write your books, and never never interfere between me and my ships, but always be there to love and admire me. A fine life for you ! "

She was saying what she thought would move him, but she was sincere. " I didn't play my part, did I ? " he said softly. " I let you down badly over it."

She looked at him defiantly. " You were right to let me down. I was a fool."

He crossed the room quickly and seized her hands. " No, you were not a fool. You were my dear, my kind young wife. I was the fool, the mug, the Gadarene swine." He kissed her. Laughter welled up behind his closed lips. It broke out of him suddenly. He laughed as though he would never stop. Perplexed and half angry, Mary stared at him. She knew she had no sense of humour, but this was surely something worse than humour—nearer madness.

Hugh pulled himself together. " Forgive me, Mary," he gasped. He left her, little spirts of laughter escaping him before he could get out of the room.

Mary stood still, frowning. What in heaven's name had there been to laugh at ? Startled, she felt a ripple of his crazy mirth in herself : there was actually something comic in their situation. She fought it down.

She saw Hugh cross the flagged terrace below her window. His face, as he strode past, was as sober as ever

man's was. She watched him out of sight. Her throat was hard and swollen with grief, but she did not cry—she would never cry over Hugh again. It mattered curiously little that he did not want her. It was, she told herself, far more important that she wanted him. So she thought and so perhaps, as she fell asleep, she believed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IT was on the evening of the next day when—she was turning out her desk—she came across Susan Putt's letter, thrust out of the way and forgotten in the upheaval of Miss Flora's death. She was profoundly shocked : the poor woman might already have died, thinking herself friendless and rejected. She changed her dress and drove into Middlesbrough. The coachman had some difficulty in finding the street, its name hardly decipherable in Susan's wretched handwriting. Mary recalled hearing that one of the benefits conferred on Susan by her association with James Roxby had been lessons in reading and writing from a grim old gentlewoman whose sense of duty had compelled her to set the young woman, as copies, every verse in the Bible which deals with the punishment of fornicators. Perhaps that was why the lessons had been so badly learned.

When at last the place was identified, it turned out to be the farthest and dimmest house in a yard behind one of the wharves—an unpleasant place in daylight and at night sinister. Leaving her carriage at the end of the wharf, Mary picked her way over the cobblestones of the yard. An indescribable smell, decaying, ratty, earthy, rose between the stones. She knocked on the door that had been pointed out to her. There was no answer. Walking in, she was in a small room, stuffed from floor to ceiling with massive pieces of furniture. Frilled plant-pots, clocks, and strange alarming erections in bamboo and lace, perched like exotic birds wherever an inch of space offered itself. Mary approached the mantelshelf where, wedged between vases, china baskets, and fans, were a dozen photographs of young women, strikingly decorous in tights and hessians. She was examining these when a door opened behind her.

She swung round. A stout elderly woman, holding a lamp, had edged herself into the room.

"I beg your pardon," Mary said. "I did knock."

"Yes, I heard you. Didn't give me long, did you? Why, I might have been doing anything at this time of night. I thought you was a friend of mine. You know how it is, I daresay. They come and they go, and I was never one to stand on ceremony with a friend, though stiff with strangers. Life's too short for flummage, ain't it? Who's going to know, when you're gorn, if you was stiff or easy?" Her voice, a powerful contralto, made Mary jump. "*Never let your chances like sunbeams pass you by, For you'll never miss the water till the well's run dry.* Better be easy and have it when you can is my advice. Take it or leave it—it's all one to me."

She stopped to adjust the lamp and Mary said hurriedly: "I came to see about Mrs. Putt, Susan Putt. Is she here? She wrote to me."

The woman regarded her thoughtfully. "Oh you did, did you? In a manner of speaking, she's here, and in another she's as good as gorn. *Let us hope the parting will not grieve you.* How long is it since you saw her, dearie?"

Mary hesitated. The death of her first husband belonged to another life, so remote, divided from her by so many strange and significant happenings, that her mind returned to it with profound reluctance.

"It must be more than twenty-five years," she said finally.

"James Roxby would be turning her off that very year," the woman exclaimed. "She didn't get anything from him, and she was set in his ways—not everybody's ways, as you can imagine. She came to me in London and says: 'Elliott, I'm off to Brussels.' I said: 'Don't you go there, my girl'—she was no girl then—'foreigners have *habits*.' They have, too. She went—and where she went after that I never heard, but she found her way

up here a year ago. 'I've come back, Mrs. Elliott,' she says, smiling a little. She had no money but what would get her here, and I said : 'Yes, I see you have. I'll take you in, Susan—you can have the top little bedroom—and I'll keep you as long as you live, but bury you I will not. You've been a poor soft fool,' I said, 'trusting a man and making no provision for yourself. You'd no right to trust anyone, least of all a gentleman. Did he ask you to trust him ? No. You done it of your own weak will. This world ain't a wet nursery,' I said. 'Where'd I be if I'd gone about trusting all the gentlemen that kept on at me in London with : "Edith, you're an angel ?"' 'No, I'm not,' I says, 'and you wouldn't be here if I was.' It does a man *good* to pay for his pleasure. What he pays for ain't on his conscience any more. Eh, what a life!' She said nothing to that, and thanked me, but I could see the thought of her parish funeral weighed on her."

Mary had taken a quick liking to the woman, whose battered face and gross body reminded her sharply of Mark Henry. Both were incorrigible reprobates, and both had the massive self-confidence that springs from knowing the worst and being equal to it. Both were hard, shameless, and capable. Mary fancied that she understood them. She had, battened under and disciplined, a store of just such crude and brutal zest for living. She fancied that she could have pulled the world's nose with an equal competence, if life had cast her lot with the Mrs. Elliotts.

"I can see you've done better for yourself than poor Susan," she said frankly. "I'll go up and see her."

The top little bedroom was dark and smelt mortal. Such light as a bedside candle gave fell on Susan Putt's poor face, so sunk, so ravaged, that only a ghost—the ghost of Mrs. James Roxby, living precariously on in Mary Hervey's memory—could have had less substance and colour. Mary bent over her. Susan's eyes met hers

with a clear startling defiance, as if her life were at bay in them.

"My side hurts," she said, in a small diffident voice.

"Why can't you give in?" Mrs. Elliott exclaimed.

"You don't suppose I want to go on living, do you?" Susan said. "I can't make myself die. Heaven knows I try hard enough." She looked up at Mary, with a pleased and trustful gaze. "You'll stay with me until I go to sleep, won't you? She takes my candle away when I'm asleep. I don't like to be without a light," she added fretfully.

Mary drew Mrs. Elliott out of the room. "I'll sit with her to-night," she said. "To-morrow I'll send a nurse in. She shouldn't be alone. Will you get someone to give my coachman a message. He is to go home now and come for me before breakfast."

Mrs. Elliott yawned and nodded. "It's not true what she says about trying," she observed. "She tries *not* to die. I've seen her at it. Funny world, ain't it? Skidoo!"

Mary went back into the attic and shut the door. Susan Putt took no further notice of her. She lay staring at the tiny circle of light to which her life had shrunk. The mind in her tired body had lost all interest in her surroundings. It knew that she suffered, that she was dying, and it sought persistently for a way of escape, doubling back on its tracks like a winded fox. The things nearest to her—dreadful details of her life in Brussels—faded first. Then she was living with James Roxby again, bending herself to his whims—the whims of a man in whose mind parsimony, superstition, and a peculiar piety fought for recognition against a genius for self-deception which used them all, and her too, in its service—learning deportment, altering her frocks to save James's money, and listening while James talked of his position, his stomach, and again his position. The listening went on interminably—until the day when she found herself

listening to her own dismissal. Her mind, in its backward journey, had reached just this point when she remembered Mary, and wrote to her. There had been something then that she wanted, an indignity to be staved off—but she had forgotten what it was. She had forgotten young Susan Putt herself, uncomfortable under James's first critical inspection. Another memory, older and more terrible, rose in her path. The child Susan had had an elder sister, a big comely hard-working young servant, in whose red kind arms the little girl slept at night. One night she woke, and found herself alone in the attic. She had had no time to be more than a little frightened when Elizabeth came back—but what an Elizabeth! Pale, soaked to the skin, she lay shivering beside Susan until morning. Then she dragged herself downstairs, tried to run away, was pursued, and soon afterwards and with the general approval hanged for getting rid by drowning it of her newly-born baby. Susan was alone now, and after crying a month or so of nights for her sister, suddenly forgot her. Now she remembered nothing else. Her mind recalled everything about Elizabeth, that she stammered when she was pleased, had freckles, knew a charm against whitlows, and was kind to a little girl. A word, a clumsy gesture, a smile—and there was Elizabeth, looking at her sister with a kindness in which no mark of time's agony remained.

The flame of the candle jumped. Mary Hervey leaned forward and said gently : " Are you asleep, Susan. Poor Susan."

Why have I lived ? Susan wondered. The thought of her life had become unbearable to her. In the farthest recesses of her body another feeling stirred. What she could not understand, another might. She would tell the younger woman everything, beginning with Elizabeth, and in the telling the story would explain itself, and the mystery of her life become clear.

She looked invitingly at Mary. But the words would

not come. Try as she might, she could not utter a single one of the memories with which her mind now teemed. She made a frightful effort. At last, it seemed to her that she was speaking. A flood of words—her whole life—was pouring out of her. And yet she was not telling all, that she must tell quickly, before her complaint and her bewilderment were both taken out of her mouth. A dreadful dissatisfaction overwhelmed her. What had she said? Had she said anything?

"I had a sister once."

Her voice was clear but weakened, the voice of a young child issuing strangely from her withered body. Mary waited, frowning. Was that all Susan Putt had to say? Her dark eyes, which she kept steadily fixed on Mary's face, were expectant.

"Were you very fond of her?" Mary whispered.

Susan's eyes closed. It was no use, then. No sudden miracle of light had followed that frightful, exhausting effort. Baffled, she gave it up. And now she would never understand why she had had to live with James Roxby and be robbed and starved in Brussels. Hadn't James always said she was stupid? "Really, Susan, after all I have tried to teach you!" The high, fretful voice was very close to her. But she could not bother with James now. She felt too ill, too tired. With a little sigh, she let herself fall asleep.

Mary watched through what remained of the short night. She disliked the sight and fact of death, and tried, as she sat watching Susan's face emerge, dimly, in the growing light, to think only of Susan Putt alive. But that was to think of Roxby House, and Archie, and of a defiant boisterous girl—herself. She saw the girl running across a lawn, with loosened hair and dress flying out, scandalising the stiff formal old gentleman she had so lately married—but learning from him to walk properly, to laugh gently, to think before she speaks. She was surprised to discover how much the Roxbys taught her.

It was a properly disciplined young woman who left Roxby House after Archie's death to try her fortune with Mark Henry—who taught her more than anyone.

How strange my life has been, she thought, folding her hands. Prepared as Miss Flora to give Providence the credit, she had an unacknowledged sense that some of it belonged to herself. She had worked hard, resented no one who had trespassed against her, and tried to think of her duty. She did not forget that she had once betrayed it by falling in love with Gerry Hardman. Providence had interfered in the nick of time—but only to keep her from making a fool of herself. The *sin* had already been committed. She put up no excuses, convinced in her mind that there were none. She had so little subtlety, and no imagination. A woman who left her husband and children was lost in this world and, but for the mercy of God, damned in the other. For all the simplicity of her belief, Mary Hervey could not yet bring herself to ask for His mercy. The truth was that she hardly believed in it. She said she did—but the root of her faith, older and more secret than the flower of forgiveness, was that God exacted His price. If she had not believed that, she would not have believed in Him at all.

The candle went out in a flare of tallow and burning paper, and she saw how high the day had climbed. A moment later, the sirens of steel mills and works pierced the young light. The mellower sound of ships' whistles, blowing from the river, stirred in her old, inassuagable longings. The springs of her life were loosed and ran in old channels. She was a little girl, waking in Mark Henry's house to the familiar exciting bustle of a ship moving down the harbour—rattle of chains, sound of men singing, and from the next room her mother's warning voice : " Put your coat on before you open your window, child." But surely that was Miss Flora's voice ? Charlotte Hansyke had fled, leaving her little girl. Poor Charlotte, poor mother, poor lost spoiled tired woman.

And just as, then, at the sound of Miss Flora's voice, a spasm of anguish and longing for her mother had seized her, so now the memory of that longing and that anguish swept over her with the sounds from the river, changing and sharpening the emotions they roused in her. Mary Hervey's eyes filled with tears. For a moment, Susan's face, sunk in her pillow, became the face of all hurt defeated women.

There was a step outside the door, and then Mrs. Elliott. In the daylight, she had a seedier air and she was grimmer about the mouth than she had seemed at night. She beckoned Mary downstairs and gave her a cup of black tea.

"You'll be leaving some money for her," she suggested.

"I think not," Mary said thoughtfully. "I'll send a nurse in, and some things."

"I daresay you're right," Mrs. Elliott agreed blandly. "It 'ud hardly seem decent to me to have money in the house and not put it to better uses than keeping her alive. The week Elliott died he cost me a fiver in liquor he could just as well have gone without. Not that I grudge Susan her share of daylight——" She stopped and added thoughtfully: "I hate the blurry dark as much as anyone."

But Susan Putt's share of daylight was now spent. When Mary came back to the house, late in the afternoon, Mrs. Elliott invited her to drink to Susan's *manes*. The profound tranquillity of Susan's face—she had died without waking—suggested that whatever terrors darkness had held for her when she was alive it held none now. Jovial and unsubdued, Mrs. Elliott pointed out that the locket Susan wore under her shift held a curl of bright coarse hair.

"It 'ud be her precious Roxby's," she suggested.

"No," Mary said. "His was black."

"So was hers," Mrs. Elliott mused. "Black as pitch. We shan't ever know whose it is. Good-bye, Susie me

dear. Good luck to you. . . . Funny, ain't it, what you keep. Now, I kept all my life—but, there, I shan't tell you. If you want to know, you can look me up on the last night." The faint flicker of an eyelid illumined that stoic countenance. "You'll be paying for a sit-down funeral?" she went on cheerfully. "Will you have her kept for a few days or not?"

"Get an oak coffin for her," Mary said sharply. "And mind it is oak. I know the difference between oak and deal, Mrs. Elliott."

"I'll be bound you do," the woman said admiringly. "And the difference between a man and a woman, too, I daresay. *One more glass before we're par-r-t-eeng.* No? So long. See you on the day." She stood on the doorstep watching Mary depart, as solid as the ground under her feet and more mutable only in the accidental attributes of flesh.

The day had turned to rain. As the carriage laboured up the long hill to the house Mary saw that the ditches were running with water. The stiff lances of the grass bent all one way under its impact, and a mingled scent of wet earth and honeysuckle hung in the heavy air. Tired of inaction, Mary stopped the carriage at a gate opening on a grassy ride and set off to walk through the wood. Her dress was soon soaked. She gathered it up in both hands and hurried on. The stems of the birches ran with rain and the track became a marsh in which her feet trod small pools that reflected a limpid light from the washed skies. She knew this path well and loved it, but it never assumed for her the significance of less charming paths she had followed as a child, in which every stone, every border of grass lying over to the wind, every hawthorn tree and flowering ditch was invested with a mysterious and poignant charm, impossible to forget or to recapture, the visible emanation of all the airy dreams and wild half-formed hopes and expectations of her childhood.

As she let herself into the walled garden she remembered

that Mempes would be waiting for her at the house. She ran across the wet lawn, paused in the hall to send him a message, changed her dress, and presented herself before him in the library, flushed and smiling.

"You'll run yourself into your grave," he grumbled. "Good heavens, Mary, when I saw you coming across the garden I thought Apollo himself was behind you." He lowered himself carefully on to a couch. "You've never learned to behave yourself—why, you're hardly respectable."

"Perhaps you wouldn't be calling here if I were," Mary said sweetly. "I'm told that Mrs. George Ling said she would rather see the Devil sitting at her table than yourself."

"The Devil is welcome to her hospitality," Mempes retorted. "I've never had a worse dinner in my life than the last I ate there. Sheer meanness, my dear Mary. The more they get, the less they spend. George Ling talked of standing for Parliament in the interests of decency and order, and asked my advice. I told him he could serve decency better by paying his men enough to keep their girls off the streets. A damned dishonest fellow, my dear Mary. How'd you get rid of t'other one, by the way?"

"I haven't got rid of him yet," Mary confessed. "But Sylvia has agreed to put it off for two years, and she's going to Louise next week. It hasn't been easy: she talked as if she were being sent away as a punishment. I hope that London will cure her. I think it will—the ridiculous child."

"Don't count on it," Mempes said abruptly. He believed that Mary was making a mistake in sending the girl from home. She should have kept her and made use of her in the firm. But he was too indolent to argue with her. A situation that promised trouble was best left alone. Moreover, he had long since ceased to offer her advice which she had ceased to expect from him. He

began to hum under his breath, and Mary waited patiently to hear what it was he had come to say to her.

He got up and stood with his back to her, at the window.

" I'm going to resign, Mary."

" Oh, but why ? " she exclaimed. She had waited six years—since the move from Danesacre—for this moment, and now that it had come she was shocked and alarmed. " Are you ill, John. . . . I shall have to sell the Line."

He turned round, and said pleasantly: " You can get another manager, my dear."

" I don't want to," she said obstinately. " If you go, the Line will be sold. Why should I bother with a new man now ? You're forcing me to sell it."

How like Mary, he thought ironically, to make him the excuse for an act so destructive of tradition that she shrank from it. To sell the Line—what would Mark Henry have said to the man or woman who suggested it ? Mempes smiled sourly. She knew as well as he did what Mark Henry would have said. She wanted to shift the blame—or was she merely being civil ? He looked at her sharply. Her transparent honesty almost did for him. Either she had never meant to sell the Line, or she had never wanted to—which was it ?

" What *do* you want to do, Mary ? " he growled.

Mary had a rueful air. She walked about the room, trying to account to herself for the emotion that had seized her. The Line was too much for her to carry—she had meant to sell it as soon as John Mempes died. It was the right, the only thing to do. It was what she had thought she wanted. And now—the moment on her—an immense reluctance surged up, sweeping away her good reasons, overwhelming her with anguish and dismay.

" I don't know," she stammered. Panic seized her. " Must I sell, John ? "

" Good God, Mary," he shouted. " Don't talk to me

like this. Of course you must sell. You've no need to own ships. You can make five times the money building 'em. You've too much on your hands—you're not getting younger, either."

"Ah," Mary said sadly, "if I sell my ships, what have I left?—nothing."

Mempes stared at her in silence. If the finest yards and shops in the kingdom were to be spoken of as a nothing, she was past help.

"My poor Mary," he said gently. "You can't put the clock back." He chuckled sardonically. "You should be thankful it's no worse," he observed. "If you were sixty-two, now. . . ."

He sat down, suddenly tired. His heart pained him. Damn these bungling doctors—they had done nothing for him but try to cut off his few Spartan pleasures.

"Atkinson has forbidden me burgundy again," he said irrelevantly. "'My good man,' I told him, 'I'll do anything in reason—but I *like* burgundy. Now you go about all day with a cigar in your mouth, a disgusting habit, which is certainly poisoning you, but would you give it up? Not you.' He had the spirit to be very short about it: 'If my cigars were putting me into my grave as fast as your burgundy is you, I would.' 'Be damned to that for a paltry lie,' I said, and turned him out of the room. What's my life worth to me, do you suppose, Mary? My friends are dead—my body's a burden to me: the fire is out—*And I shall shortly be with them that rest.* . . . Why the devil should I cling to the Line for you to sell it the day I die?" he burst out violently.

"But I've just told you I don't want to sell," Mary murmured.

His attention wandered. He had thought many times lately of betaking himself to London to live in those rooms behind Devonshire House in which, when Mark Henry was alive, he had spent the latter half of the winter season. Mark Henry preferred the earlier. There, turning over

his books, and a step from his club, he could live tolerably—on twice the income he now had. He had run through almost everything. Mary would want to give him a pension—but he was damned if he could stand that—let her pension poor stupid Emily, the only person who would actually suffer by his death. His thoughts turned and twisted. Was that boy his? Emily said so. He would never know, but he was glad he had provided for him in . . . where the devil had he sent Emily's boy? No matter—the boy had been grateful. Or said he was. Gratitude was out of place in the circumstances, he thought, with that cynicism his own honesty and experience of life had taught him.

" Damned silly business," he exploded. Mary looked at him in surprise. He pulled himself together and apologised to her, returning slowly from a past into which his tired mind slipped thankfully.

" Will you let the whole matter rest for a time? "

A quick anger assailed him. He had made his decision. He had resigned—to spare her the necessity of waiting for him to die. The thought of retracing that painful step was repugnant to him. Why couldn't she let things alone? What a woman! His anger died as suddenly as it had risen. After all—he was not yet useless. What he had secretly hoped for had happened, and Mary had been taken aback, and had protested. He had almost triumphed. And yet—a profound disquietude took hold of him. He was too old, too tired, to cope even with a Line so attenuated as Garton's. He made mistakes. He forgot men and things. Rest—rest was what he wanted. He smiled grimly. It was not true—he longed for strength, for the impossible, for youth, for a young girl looking from the eighteenth century window of Mark Henry's office across the quiet waters of the upper harbour, for his dreams.

" Have it your own way, Mary."

" Thank you," she said. A shadow—of contempt for

her own weakness ?—clouded her eyes. " I wanted to talk to you about Richard," she said hurriedly.

" Getting out of hand again ? " Mempes said drily.

" No—yes, if you like. But I see now that I must give him more rope in the firm." She blushed under Mempes' gaze, and said stiffly: " I've interfered with him too much."

" You're a remarkable woman, Mary. . . . You're quite right, of course—but you'll never bring yourself to do it."

" I want you to help me." She looked at him with a meditative smile. " When I begin domineering again, scold me. It's not easy for me to give things up. And I'd forgotten that the moment would come when I should *have* to give Richard up. I shan't find it easy to turn my back, and to pretend I'm not watching. And even that's not enough. One must *give up* watching and caring and supporting. Disclaim all responsibility. It hurts me, John. If I didn't know, now, that I've behaved badly in not letting him go——"

" The boy's all right, my dear."

She stood up and looked away from him. " I shall leave you until dinner," she said gently. " Please rest," and left him, his mind divided between the sensations of amazement and fatigue.

She stood for a long time leaning against a window in her room. She had made a fool of herself over the Line—but she did not care. She who had seen, and made, so many changes, now could not face change. It was not true that she thought of the new works as nothing ; she was as proud of them and their superb order and efficiency as any housewife—the good Yorkshire housewife she really was—and anxious to boast of them to Mark Henry. They satisfied one of her most profound instincts—the need to surround herself with visible signs of her security and success. When she thought of them she felt miraculously safe, as if death was not long enough in the arm to reach past them.

She was not afraid of losing them, but she had already begun to be afraid of losing herself. She saw now that nothing, unless she could fasten it down, imprison it in her memory, was safe from the devouring cruelty of time. If she could, she would have kept everything, every memory. Nothing must be lost. A sudden thought sent her hurrying across the room. After a time she found what she was looking for, buried under a pile of books at the top of a cupboard. This was the small leather box in which, when she left Roxby House for Danesacre, she had packed all Richard's clothes and her own. It had held everything she then possessed. All those things were gone, and their place in the box was filled by a half-dozen fine delicate shifts, acquired one by one during those early years in Mark Henry Garton's house, when she was so poor that one shabby frock served her for all occasions. Seldom enough, perhaps when he was pleased or excited, Mark Henry flung her a tip. Most of these windfalls were spent on Richard, but with the others, obeying an obscure youthful impulse, she had bought these useless garments of lace and fine lawn, and stored them away for the undefined occasion when she would take them out and clothe herself softly. And the moment had never come. She had certainly taken them out—each folded carefully over a bag of lavender in soft blue paper—a dozen times in her life. Yet, strangely, none of these times had seemed the right one, and back they had gone into the shabby box.

It was with no thought of wearing them that she took them out now. Lace and linen were yellowing despite the magic blue paper, and only the ghost of a scent hung round the bags of lavender, like a subtle essence crushed from all the days and years they had been lying in this box, a secret not shared by any person in the world. "Why have I never worn them?" she asked herself. Slowly, smoothing the paper with her fingers, she laid them in the box again, and pushed it out of sight.

CHAPTER VIII

NICHOLAS was kneeling on the window-seat in his room when his sister came in. He had been kneeling there a long time, looking out over the daisied turf to the rustling tops of trees below the lawn, where five green terraces stepped down the side of the hill. He had begun, of course, by thinking of Sylvia, but, imperceptibly, beguiled by the grandeur of the bellying white clouds, he forgot her. She became part of his delight in the sun-drenched earth, her hair the whispering birch trees and her voice the clear sound of innumerable small streams crossing the garden from the moor.

He did not hear Cynthia, and she stood for a moment in the doorway smiling at the dreaming boy. When she spoke to him, he turned and slid quickly from the window-seat.

"May I come in, Nicky?"

"I was thinking about you."

Cynthia laughed at him. "I know you were not."

"I was," the boy persisted. "Are you going to marry Richard Roxby, Cynthia, or aren't you? I wish you'ud make up your mind."

She frowned, jerking her slender body forward. "Don't interfere, Nicky."

"I'm not," he said humbly. "But you ought to, you know, my dear. Don't you like him?"

"Too much." She sat down, and looked at him with a friendly smile. "Oh, Nicky, why aren't you my father instead of only my young brother? I need advice—or a thrashing—which is it? You're no use to me, are you?"

He smiled sweetly. "I can't thrash you," he said. "And you wouldn't take my advice. What's the matter,

my dear ? " He leaned on her chair, and laid an arm over her thin shoulders. " Tell me about it."

" There's nothing to tell you." She sighed. " I want to go back to London next week."

He turned pale and stammered. " Must we go ? I've another fortnight. It—I like it here, Cynthy."

" I know you do," she said maliciously. A glance at his disturbed young face sobered her. She seized his hand between her own. " Be kind to me, Nicky. Listen carefully and I'll tell you about it. Richard has asked me to marry him and live here—not here—in Roxby House, that huge frightful house on the edge of the moor. I can't bear it, and I do like him so much, Nicky. I must go away—can't you see ? Dear kind stupid Nicky, can't you understand ? "

The boy frowned. " No. If you love him—you must want to live with him. Don't you ? "

" Of course I do," she said impatiently. " But not here—I can't live here. No shops, no music, no Park, no conversation, no theatre—nothing. Three hundred miles from London and half a continent from Paris. I couldn't endure it."

Nicholas slid from the arm of her chair, and stood back to look at her. " I don't understand," he said curtly. " You ought to want to do *anything* for him."

She sat up, poking out her chin in a long stubborn line. " You're talking nonsense, Nicky. Would you give up the army because your precious Sylvia asked you to ? "

" That's different," he said calmly. " Soldiering is my job. Marrying should be yours. Why don't you do it ? "

" Did I ask to be a woman ? " she said fiercely. " Why wasn't I a man, able to go everywhere and do everything." She struck the arms of her chair. " You're not half a man, Nicky. *I'd* show you all. Do you remember Buckingham saying furiously to a dog : ' I wish you was

married and settled in the country'? I can't imagine anything duller. Now, I'd enjoy life properly if I were a man. I'd travel, spend money, have dozens of women, and marry none of them." She broke off, half laughing at her own vehemence.

"You have queer enough ideas of manliness," the boy said mischievously. "I never heard worse nonsense. How would you like it if your husband shared them?" He knelt beside the chair and put his arms round her. "You'd better take him, Cynthy. You'll be so miserable if you don't. Did you think you could go away and just forget about it? You tell me I'm childish, but I know better than that."

"You think you'll remember your Sylvia, do you?" his sister jeered. "Why, she's going to London herself next week. You'll see her once or twice, perhaps, if I'm nice to you and get you invited to the same houses. She may even let you dance with her—once."

"Don't, Cynthy."

"I won't—but you mustn't sermonise me."

"I don't want to sermonise," the boy said gravely. "You talk so wildly. . . . I like Richard. I wish you were married."

"And safe—eh, my dear? I'd marry him to-morrow if he would only be reasonable." She leaned forward, so near to him that her bright hair brushed his cheek. "He'll come after me if I run away, won't he?"

Nicholas jumped up. "That's what you think?" he exclaimed. "I shouldn't count on it, Cynthy. You said yourself—these Roxbys are as obstinate as be damned, and stiff into the bargain."

"He's not the only one. You forget that I'm a Roxby too."

"You're a woman," he said quietly.

She caught fire at once. "It doesn't make me pleased to be bullied by every male creature who wants to marry me."

"You're trying to bully Richard. You want to take him away from—this." He glanced through the window at the wide prospect, smooth and varied as a park, with wood, and pasture, and bright water.

"From those revolting slag heaps," Cynthia cried. "From the people—and that moor." Her face cleared. "He'll give in, and come hurrying after me. You'll see."

"You're pretty enough to make anyone hurry," Nicholas said loyally. "But I wish you wouldn't do it, Cynthy."

She laughed gaily. "You're too soft-hearted, my dear. Why don't you fall in love with Clarry? She's perfectly your style. You'd better think of her, Nicky."

He shook his head. "Clarry wouldn't have me," he said lightly.

"Ask her and see." Cynthia was half way to the door. "She'll be very rich, you know." He thought she had gone, but she came back to poke her laughing face round the door and fling him a kiss. "Bless you."

He went back to his window-seat, and stayed there, nursing his thin knees, until Clara beckoned him from the garden. He hurried down and found her waiting for him at the foot of the staircase. She invited him to take her on the 'river,' a deep little stream running through the valley from the old flour mill in the village.

They walked slowly through the gardens, in a happiness compounded of youth, friendliness, and the sunny afternoon, until they came out on the meadows falling in a blaze of white and yellow to the valley. Clara danced in front of him, her dress brushing the tall grasses on either side of the path.

"Is it true you're going next week, Nicky?"

"My sister says so."

She sighed. "I shall miss you," she said honestly.

He smiled at her. "Shall I come again, then?"

"I hope you will. You don't make me look a fool—as

so many people do. It's true I'm stupid, and I know nothing, but I do dislike being told it."

He was far from thinking her a fool. Starting from the discovery that she was kind, he had quickly found that she had an acute lively mind, and a habit—which sometimes startled him—of thinking for herself. She had a sense of humour, too, and no vanity. Altogether, he liked her better than he knew. When they reached the level stretch of turf beside the river, he drew her arm under his.

"Why don't you come to London with—your sister?" His tongue cheated him of Sylvia's name. "Sylvia, Sylvia," the grasses repeated. Why was he such a fool?

Clara chuckled. "Aunt Louise wouldn't have me. She went back to London declaring that my manners were more suited to a circus than a drawing-room. Yet she likes to talk to me."

"Aunt Louise is a devil," the boy said fervently. "She frightens me so much that I'd rather be shot than live with her."

"I wish she had taken me," Clara murmured. "We might have seen each other in London sometimes. Though I don't suppose you'd want to see me," she added reflectively.

Nicholas stopped short and took her by the shoulders. "I should," he said seriously. The laughing face below his own sobered. "I like you—*awfully*. I'm glad you'll miss me, Clarry." Something sprang between them from that touch, and her look—a subtle trembling of the air. Nicholas half stooped. In another instant he would have kissed her. To his amazement, tears welled in her eyes; she laid her hand across his mouth.

"Please not, Nicky."

"Why—my dear——" the boy stammered. "Have I hurt you?"

"No." A ripple of mirth followed her tears. "See—I'll kiss *you*. To prove it."

She raised herself with a light pressure of her hand on his arm and brushed his mouth with hers. One of the tears she had shaken away fell on his cheek.

"Is it all right?" he asked humbly.

Clara sighed, and laughed. "Everything's all right, Nicky. Come along now, let's hurry and get the boat out." She tore her sleeve on a nail in the boat-house. "First misfortune," she said ruefully. The second was to be more startling than they expected.

Nicholas pulled slowly against the stream. He had half forgotten her, and the moment in which he had been held to her by so strange and delicate a bond. His mind drowsed over small things, the scatter of bright drops from his oar, a quiver of wings along the bank, and the tiny singing of a lark. The bright eye of a water rat, sunning himself like a village worthy at the door of his house, startled him and made him laugh. Warmed by the sun and his happiness, he felt time run beneath him like a stream, carrying him to an unimagined consummation.

And she—is she happy? Ask her. Ask her with what care to remember them, she notes the smooth pure outline of his cheek and the fine hairs on his boy's hands. What she will not tell you, and he cannot, her eyes, those clear honest eyes, will. Tears and laughter tremble in them. This poor child is in love. But after all, she is happy—why pity her?

Nicholas rested on his oars, and the stream, catching the boat by her nose, swung her round. Clara drew her hand out of the water. "Must we go back?" she said sadly.

"I thought we might stop here," Nicholas said. He edged in to the bank and jumped ashore, the rope in his hand. He had his back to her, making the boat fast, when she decided to follow him. She caught, to steady herself, at a low branch: before she could jump, the tied boat swung out from the bank, and still holding to the tree, she stepped over its side into the water and sank over

her shoulders. Nicholas leaned out and caught her before she found breath to speak. He pulled her on to the bank. A pool spread round her from her soaked clothes. She glanced at them in dismay and then at him.

"How could I be such a fool?" she exclaimed. His startled face was too much for her, and she broke into a peal of laughter, clinging to him. "I walked into the water," she stammered. "Nicky, what shall we do?"

"Get you dry," he said briefly. "Whose is that farm?"

He hurried her over the grass and into the sunken lane. Here she halted soberly to wring the water from her dress, glancing at him over her shoulder. "Are you very annoyed with me, Nicky? No one else would have been so clumsy."

He put an arm round her waist and said consolingly: "You did it very neatly. Now come along." At the farm he handed her over to the woman and waited, in a parlour smelling of old leather, pinks, and beeswax, until he was summoned to the kitchen, where he found Clara wrapped in an enormous red dressing-gown on a sofa by the fire. He sat down beside her. "I suppose I look a fright," she said. "Don't tell me. I know I do."

"You look like a little girl at a party," he retorted. Bright eyes, soft hair, small rosy face—why did he not love her when he liked her so much? He could have caressed her with pleasure. He took hold of her hand, lying palm upwards on her knee. "You gave me a shock, Clarry. Are you all right?"

She nodded. A tide of colour swept over her face. She turned away.

"What is it, my dear?" he asked anxiously.

"Nothing. Except that I wish I hadn't done it. You think me an idiot, don't you?"

"I don't. I promise I don't." He bent over her. "Look at me and see." She looked up into the kind serious young face; her arms parted weakly and her lips

quivered. He might kiss her as much as he would now, comforting her, and himself too, for his own young hurt.

"Oh, Nicky, I wish you were happy."

"I am—at least," he stammered, "I wish you were."

She sent him back to his chair. "Let's be awfully sensible. Do you think I need tell my mother I fell in?"

"Why should you?"

"I was a disappointment to her the moment I was born," she said dreamily. "She wanted a boy, and had me." Laughter bubbled in her again. "I was a fat, awkward and *hideous* baby, the image of old George Roxby. . . . Talk to me about yourself now, Nicky. Do you like soldiering? I don't care for it myself. I know you're all very brave, but—killing people as a profession . . . no, my dear."

"I haven't killed anyone yet," he said teasingly. "And I don't suppose I shall get the chance—though there's always the hope of Upper Burma or the Frontier."

"But you might. Carving them up with your sword. Ugh!"

"*I* might be carved up."

She turned pale. "That would be your own fault," she said seriously, shuddering. He was half ready to be angry with her, when the woman came in with a bundle he took to be her clothes, and he went back to his parlour.

What breeze there was had fallen into the pit of the afternoon, and as they toiled up to the house, standing in the sun on its hill-top, he noticed that Clarry was still pale. He asked her if she were tired. She shook her head; then, as they stepped into the cool well of the house, she stumbled on to the nearest chair. She recovered at once to smile at him—if she had been dying she would have contrived as much, for his comfort. A door behind her opened and Sylvia came into the hall. She looked at them curiously.

"Tea's over. I've been looking for you everywhere, Nicholas."

" I'm sorry," the boy said anxiously. " What did you want ? "

" A nothing, a nothing," she said airily. " What have you done to yourself, Clarry ? You look like a draggled young hen." She turned back to Nicholas. " I wanted you to come down to Mrs. Mardon's cottage with me. I promised the old humbug some jellies, and my mother won't let me out of her sight alone. She's afraid I'll run away. She trusts me with you."

" You know that's not true," Clara said serenely. " She trusts you out of her sight all day. She only asked you to stay in the garden to-day because——" She broke off, seeing in the boy's glance at her sister so much unconscious worship that she had no courage to go on.

" Have it your own way," Sylvia retorted. " Are you coming, Nicky ? "

She swept him off, pausing long enough on the terrace to catch her mother's eye. Mrs. Hervey was tired, he thought, but she smiled at him with a friendliness that warmed his young heart. A short cut through the kitchen garden took them to the lane. Sylvia was in her haughtiest mood and snubbed his small attempts at conversation so ruthlessly that he held his tongue and contented himself with glancing at her face. Her wide hat hid it from him except when she turned her head to cry : " Hurry, Nicky." He lagged as much as he dared—if only the road would never end ! She repented when they came in sight of the village, and let him dawdle as he liked. She even seemed happy to linger with him in the rustling little lane, and was so kind, so attentive, that his spirits rose wildly. Once a pink rose swinging out from the hedge caught her eye, and she stopped to pick a bud and fasten it in his jacket.

" How lovely you are ! " he said involuntarily.

She looked at him gently. " Do you like me as much as ever ? "

" More," the boy said gravely.

She laughed at him, her eyes alive with mischief. "I warned you it was no use. You're too young and too staid for me. I want a very different sort of life, Nicky; something adventurous." She held out her arms. "Oh, life, life. I want everything, Nicky, and you couldn't do anything at all for me, could you, except look at me as if I were a saint? I'm not a saint, as my dear sister could tell you—but she won't. She's too charitable. How I hate charity."

Old Mrs. Mardon's cottage was at the far end of the village in a narrow lane, behind a high stone wall. She left him outside to saunter up and down, and think—between despair and ecstasy—of covering himself with glory in war with the Russians, or any other nation. He dwelt on the scene until its details stood out sharply in his mind, his blade flashing in the sun, the hoarse cries of the men, his own indifference to death, and at last death. When he had died twice, the scene struck him as more comic than impressive, and he abandoned it without regret.

Further along the lane the wall became a hedge, beyond which he could look across a wide open valley. By now, clouds had come between him and the sun, subduing the whole valley to the insubstantial colours of a dream, though a spire here and a copse there still gleamed and winked like jewels in the bright haze. He turned back towards the cottage and stared for what seemed an hour at the old wall, yellowed by time, traced over with tiny creeping plants, ivy-leaved toad flax and such, and the gleaming tracks of snails. At last, too impatient to wait any longer, he marched down the narrow path to the cottage and knocked. A thin old voice called him to come in.

He stood in the doorway, blinking the light out of his eyes. From the other side of the small room old Mrs. Mardon made propitiatory noises. She hoped she could turn this intrusion to her profit. In her simple hierarchy,

gentry existed to be spoiled. This was gentry—or wasn't it? She peered hopefully, turning her head about like a hen in a granary.

"You can sit down," she said loudly. "And you can read to me if you like, though I shan't understand a word of it." She accepted the gentry's passion for these exercises as readily as she accepted everything that had happened to her, from the far-off spaces of her childhood to this moment when, old and helpless, she waited with malicious certitude for her reward in heaven. She would be gentry there—the meek inheriting the skies—and she had every intention of reading to her earthly benefactors until they cried for mercy.

"If you're the new young curate I mun tell you at once that I don't mind prayers if they be short. I can't stand long prayers. They give me wind. I'm less in need of prayers than most."

"Where is Miss Hervey?" Nicholas exclaimed.

"She hasn't left anything here."

"I didn't suppose she had," he said politely. "I asked you where she was." He had a dreadful sense that the old woman was laughing at him. He could hear the beating of his heart. The conviction that he had made a fool of himself was followed by a fierce loathing of old Mrs. Mardon. He turned to go.

"She's been gone an hour," Mrs. Mardon said spitefully. "She went through t'back."

Nicholas opened the back door and shut it gently behind him. He scrambled over a low wall into a field and ran.

He was running blindly along its edge when a thought halted him. Sylvia must have had a motive other than plain mischief in playing such a trick on him—what was it? He knew at once. Rage and misery descended on him together. He looked round him to see where she could have hidden herself with Captain Ling, and saw a wood of beech trees over the crest of the field. He walked towards it.

They were there, the man smiling into Sylvia's glowing face, and she so full of what she had to say to him that when she saw Nicholas she only frowned, as if he were a tiresome visitor. He planted himself in front of her.

"What are you doing here, Sylvia?"

"You can see what Miss Hervey is doing," Captain Ling said pleasantly. "She is talking to me. Do you mind waiting a little farther off?"

"Run away, Nicholas," Sylvia said impatiently. "I told you to wait outside the cottage."

"Why didn't you tell me you were going to meet this fellow?" Her look of anger glanced off him. "I'm going to take you home," he said coldly.

Sylvia's eyes glittered. "I'm not ready to go home. Please wait for me somewhere out of sight. If I had known you were going to interfere with me I should have come alone. I thought you were too decent to spy."

"You don't know a decent man from the other kind," the boy said ridiculously. "Or you wouldn't be here talking to this wretched fellow who persuades you to meet him behind your mother's back."

"Your back is a pleasanter sight than your face just now," Ling said drily. "You're wasting my time. Did you hear what Miss Hervey said to you?"

Nicholas did not look at him. "Are you coming, Sylvia?"

He was startled by her voice and the fury with which she turned on him. "Will you go away now?" she said, in a loud grating voice, "before I hate you? I wish you'd been blind and deaf before you came poking yourself into my business. I wish I'd never seen you and your dull stupid face. Go away. Go home and tell my mother. Tell Clarry—she'll join with you in deploring me. Tell everyone—only go."

He faced her in an agony. "I can't go without you, my dear."

"You'll either go or be sent," Ling said suddenly. "As one man to another I advise you to go. As man to boy, I'll give you one minute to get out. Now."

Blind and hot with rage, Nicholas struck at him. A second later, without knowing in the least how it had happened, he was on his back staring up through the leafy branches. He felt sick. Then he heard Sylvia laugh.

He scrambled somehow to his feet and walked off. The ground rose under him like the deck of a ship. He grazed his forehead on a branch. His head ached and his tongue felt swollen. He was glad to lie down and dabble his face and hands in a spring gushing up through the coarse reedy grass beyond the wood. Tears of rage and humiliation ran down his cheeks when he got up. If she had not laughed——He stumbled on.

Long before he reached the house he had passed from anger to a sharpened grief. He must do something for her—there was nothing to be done—he couldn't give her away. He thought of Clarry. She would know what to do. Now he was in a fever to get to her. He ran. The wall of the kitchen garden reminded him that he could get into the house by a side door. He took that way, and by supreme good fortune got himself into the hall unseen. In its shadowed depths a shaft of sunlight, falling across the floor, dazzled his eyes. He faced the stairs with misgiving, and when he had gained the landing he saw Clara just disappearing into her room. He followed her, opening the door and closing it behind him with a breathless sense of relief. Here he was—and there she was—turning to look at him with an astonishment that softened, as he ran across the room to her, into an unimagined gentleness. That she should open her arms and he fall into them was but the natural conclusion to his unnatural tale.

"Why—oh, my dearest dear—what is it?"

He had had time to wonder what she thought of him.

He let her go and said ruefully : " I beg your pardon, Clarry."

" You needn't," she said simply. " I love you so much."

He sighed with relief. " Then I can stay here with you."

Did he know what a sight he was, she wondered ? His shirt was torn and his chin cut and bleeding. She offered to sponge it. He submitted to her awkward efforts, watching her movements with mingled doubt and mirth.

" I'm hurting you more than I'm washing you," she said at last. " I do everything badly."

He did not know whether he was going to laugh or cry. He put his arms round her and pressed his forehead against her shoulder. " I'm not fit to touch you. Do you mind ? "

She said nothing. He glanced at her and stammering a little said: " Will you have me, then, Clarry ? "

" Nay, how can I ? " she asked him sadly, " when it's Sylvia you want."

He shook his head. " I can't do without you." He added honestly: " I didn't feel like this until now."

" Oh, is it true ? " Clarry said. " You wouldn't tell me lies about it, Nicky ? I should find out—and die."

" Don't die," he said sweetly. " I must have you now, Clarry."

She noticed that he had not said : I love you. " I must be sure," she said desperately. " It's not like it was for Sylvia, is it ? "

His eyes, as clear and honest as her own, clouded. " That hurt—this doesn't," he said briefly. He thought he might fall, and stiffened himself with an effort. " Don't you want me, after all ? "

Does a thirsty man want water, or a mother her child ? She gave him her body to lean on and her mouth to kiss without another thought for herself. He took them with

delight and a decent gratitude. There was still something he had to tell her, but for the moment he let it go.

The stable clock, striking seven, roused both of them. He looked at himself in her glass and was disgusted by his appearance. He told her what had happened to him. Even his humiliation was more bearable as she listened to it. A new pride sprang in him. He was some years older than the boy who had waited outside that detestable cottage. The boy was still alive—he winced at the story—but Nicholas was able to strangle him. And if the ghost, staring and piteous, followed him about the room, from Clara's arms to the window and back again, he could give it a '*Hic et ubique? then we'll change our ground*,' and without bitterness.

"I don't think it matters," Clara said thoughtfully. "She won't meet him again—after to-morrow."

He turned his head slowly to look at her, and she contrived to smile. "I thought you knew—Aunt Louise wants her a week earlier. She's going away to-morrow."

That should not shake him—or hurt her. He laughed cheerfully and said: "Well, that settles it. We needn't do anything. He's a bad man, Clarry—she'll forget him, I hope." He jerked his head up. "I can't come down to dinner like this. Tell them I've had a fall, will you, my dear? And—bless you. . . . If ever I fail you, my gallantest dear——" He stooped to kiss her. "I shan't see you again to-night, shall I? Good-night."

"Good-night—good-night—my love," Clarry said.

When he had gone, she began to change her dress with shaking fingers. In her hurry she poked her finger through a flounce: resignedly, she sat down on her bed to run it together. She would be late for dinner—what matter? It is not every day that a miracle happens. She had no misgivings—nothing but an overwhelming sense of peace and contentment. Of course she was not for Nicholas what Sylvia had been—was still, perhaps?—she was the lover and he the loved. Let it be so. She

was content. She had only one thought and one wish—to comfort him. No doubt she would not always be so happy as she was now—she knew dimly that pain, not less than exaltation, attends such love as hers for Nicholas, and the knowledge did not disturb her. She had no pride, no jealousy.

A subtle change came over her thoughts. Surely now her mother would be impressed by her, and pleased? Surely Mary Hervey's face would take on—for her elder daughter—the delicate air of surprise and animation it wore so often for the younger? And just as in her childhood she had brought Mary blood-stained pincushions and useless little mats worked with sprays of fuchsia, picturing in advance the look of delight which, when the time came, Mary forgot to assume, so now she saw herself bringing Mary the story of her engagement to Nicholas Roxby. This time the gift would not fail of its effect. This time Mary would laugh and be delighted. She would begin to plan and arrange—she who so loved arranging—for the daughter who had given her this marvellous occasion. Sighing with pleasure, Clara put the last stitches in her flounce and went down to dinner. . . .

Sylvia went off to London the next morning with Hugh, who was to take her there and come back at once. He was too busy to stay. She was buoyed up to an excitement that astonished Clara, who knew what she was leaving behind. But perhaps Captain Ling meant to follow her, and their meetings would go on? Clara could hardly believe it. In London, under the sharp eye of Aunt Louise, the reckless girl would be too carefully watched. She would have worried more persistently over Sylvia's deceit if her mind had not been full of her own affairs.

She had first to make sure that Nicholas had not changed his mind. She sought him out and put the question directly.

He shook his head, smiling. "You're all I have and all I want, Clarry. The real question is—do you want a

penniless husband ? I believe I have four hundred a year of my own, but it all goes in expenses of one sort or another. Then there's my job. You don't like soldiers——"

"I like you," Clara said quickly.

"I couldn't get out. It's not so much that I like the army—I don't very much—but it's all I can do." He blushed. "I'm not ambitious, Clarry."

Her eyes sparkled. "Heaven only knows what kind of a wife I shall make you. Do soldiers' wives travel very much ? I can't even pack my own clothes. I'm certain that if we have a child it will despise me from the moment it's born."

"Shall we have a child ?" Nicholas said dreamily. She was silent. He looked at her, and his heart moved in his body. He put an arm round her shoulders. "You don't know how much I *like* you," he exclaimed. "I'll pack your clothes, I'll do everything for you. It's going to be all right. I promise it is. . . ."

For two days, with success in her grasp, Clara kept back her secret. She told herself that this was the first time she had ever been certain of pleasing Mary—but it was not true. There had been a pincushion or so that by mere excess of labour put into them, and blood lost, had seemed certain to please. It was only afterwards, in the icy gloom of the event, that she had seen them for the trivial failures they were. If this should turn out to be trivial—but that was nonsense. She would not think of such a thing.

At last, nervous and smiling, she walked boldly into Mary's room and blurted out her news. Her mother was standing by the window reading, and with a queer air of disbelief, a letter that had come by the London post. She looked up and frowned. Her eyes did not clear, though she smiled.

"I'm very glad," she said hurriedly. "Very pleased——" A strange note—of appeal ?—came into

her voice. " I'm sorry, Clarry, but this letter from your aunt—you can read it yourself."

She pushed Louise's letter into her daughter's hand. It was very short and it bristled with exclamation marks. Sylvia had left the house the evening before, slipping out of the front door into Berkeley Square with a dressing-case in one hand and the umbrella Louise had just given her in the other. An hour after she had gone, and half an hour after her absence was discovered, a letter from her arrived by messenger. It said simply that she was all right, that she meant being married at once, and would come back to collect her clothes as soon as she was actually Sylvia Ling. She sent her love to her mother. That was all. No regrets, no excuses. Louise had enclosed the letter in her own : its fine unwavering lines contrasted with the old lady's agitated scrawl.

Clara folded it carefully and laid it down. What ought she to say ? Of all the jaunty little phrases she had composed and practised—to cover an impossible failure—not one would do.

CHAPTER NINE

HER journey to London remained in Mary's mind as a penitential witness to the improbability of time. In an eight hours' journey she aged a year, and nothing was added to her comfort by the presence in her carriage of Mrs. Captain James, who arrived at the station when the train, packed to the doors, was on the instant of starting, and ran distractedly up and down, seeking a corner for herself and her disreputable little bag. For decency's sake, Mary beckoned her into the carriage she had reserved : with equal decency Mrs. James would have refused—but her husband hoisted her in at once, applying to her as she balanced in the doorway what he intended for a genial pat. It precipitated her across the carriage and, much alarmed, he ran beside the moving train shouting : " Hinny, hinny—if you've scraped yoursen tell me, and I'll ha' you out again."

As the train rounded the curve beyond the station, Mary saw him demonstrating the affectionate gesture to a grimly attentive Mempes, whose comment, accompanied by a dandefied tilt of his top hat, cut the demonstration suddenly short.

John Mempes, scarcely recovered from a severe attack of gout, had come down to see her off. She scolded him for his imprudence, but she was grateful. He had refused to be startled by Sylvia's flight.

" You'll find she's all right, Mary," he said cheerfully. " She makes life difficult for herself, but she's equal to it. I don't know that Rupert Ling is a bad choice. He can keep her in order." He added thoughtfully : " He'll give her less trouble than a younger man would. He has no scruples—but then he has no curiosity left, either."

" He wanted me to make room for him in the firm."

" Well, my dear ? "

" I won't have him," Mary said grimly. " He made his choice when Mark Henry died. Let him stick to it. I'll make them an allowance—and that's all Sylvia will get, now and afterwards."

Her obstinacy alarmed him, but he was too wise to show it. " Don't alienate the child," he said mildly.

Mary's face softened into a smile. " I'll be everything you'd approve," she promised, " provided you don't ask me to embrace Rupert Ling. That's something I can't do."

" Well, let him embrace you," he advised her.

" I'll see. . . . You were right about Sylvia. I should have taken your advice."

" Did I give you any ? " he said in surprise. " I'm sure you were right to refuse it. Good-bye, my dear. Try to remember that your daughter is as stubborn as yourself, and not so—disciplined."

Was she disciplined ? She leaned back in the rattling dusty carriage and wondered ruefully whether she were indeed any wiser than her younger self. I make the same mistakes again and again, she thought : I arrange people's lives for them to a point where they can't stand it, and then they run away from me. But though she accused herself, she accused Ling with far more bitterness. He was the start and fountain of the evil. He had dazzled Sylvia and seduced her from her senses. But for him the wilful young creature would now be enjoying the successes Mary had planned for her. He had ruined her. Mary reflected grimly that Mrs. Rupert Ling would need all her spirit when she came back. There had never been any hope of keeping the affair quiet. It was the common talk. She glanced sharply at Mrs. James, whose eye, calm and twinkling, met hers without embarrassment.

" Don't mind me, hinny," she said comfortably. " I know why you're hurrying up to London, but there—girls were always girls, and I like spirit."

"My daughter and her husband will travel back with me," Mary said stiffly.

"Quite right," Mrs. James said. "No good ever came of quarrelling with a marriage. You can't live another woman's life for her—often enough you can scarcely live your own. When James's sister's girl married a Spaniard her mother said she'd as soon see her dead as living with that savage young foreigner. 'You silly woman,' I said to her, 'do you suppose they're sleeping under t'bed?' Nor your girl's not, either, and I'll be bound she's happy." She settled herself in her corner and slept soundly, until Mary woke her to share a luncheon basket, over which—a wing of chicken held delicately between two fingers—she observed bluntly that James had heard the Line was to be sold.

"Not yet," Mary said emphatically. "Not in Mr. Mempes' lifetime."

Mrs. James sighed with relief. "I shan't know what to do when James retires," she said. "Think of me anchoring for the rest of my life in Danesacre. I've nowt against t' town—it's the best in t'world. But—I never had a house, hinny, and I don't know that I want one. I might have felt differently if I'd had childer, but all James and me possess is stowed away in his cabin on board the *Mark Henry* and if I had to spread myself about a house I shouldn't feel comfortable. Not to mention seeing the blessed same thing every time I opened a window. No, my dear. It's been my prayer to die at sea along of James, and if one of us has to go ahead it 'ud best be me, for I don't know that I could get on for long without James, after all these years."

"You remind me of something I once thought," Mary said impulsively. She broke off in confusion. What she had thought eluded her, like a face, familiar and forgotten, seen for a moment across a space of years. She looked helplessly at her friend.

Mrs. James eyed her shrewdly. "You never thought

what you hadn't felt first," she observed. "Mark Henry Garton was the same. You could tell him a thing till you was dumb and he'd never believe you until the day it fell on him from heaven. Then he'd damn everyone and use it. That girl of yourn is as like Mark Henry as you was." She chuckled quietly. "Th'old devil—trust him to hang on where he could."

She wiped her fingers, composing herself for sleep again with the ease of an old sailor. She swayed and nodded. The train rushed on through the flat midland fields, and Mary wondered whether Hugh had managed to trace Sylvia. She had no intention of waiting until Sylvia chose to present herself. She must find her, and if the marriage had not yet taken place, arrange it, ceremoniously. The possibility that Sylvia would resent her interference crossed her mind only to be dismissed. The child had been wicked and foolish—but she was not unmanageable, not cruel. Her mind called up a picture of Sylvia, in tears, clinging to her, imploring the help and encouragement her mother, alone of all persons in the world, knew best to give her.

The time dragged on, an eternity of weariness and dusty heat; she drowsed in her corner, woke, and drowsed again. It was not so bad—it was irreparable—her mind swung from dreams to reality, courage to despair. And beneath every conscious effort it made to drag victory from defeat there persisted, glowing and fading, the figure of a wilful obstinate little girl, hurting herself, hurting everyone, but never giving in. Poor wilful child. Poor Sylvia. "Oh, my dear," Mary said silently, "did *I* do this to you?" A feeling of guilt oppressed her. Yet—what had she done? how had she failed?

Hugh met her at King's Cross with the news that he had found the hotel where Sylvia stayed the evening she ran away. It was, you might say, a shabby respectable little house off the Strand. She had stayed there alone, arriving in a cab, the woman said, with the gentleman who

had booked the room for her earlier in that day. Afterwards he had taken her out to dine, fetching her back very late, later than the proprietress liked. However, she had left in the morning, very happy, laughing, and eager at the last moment to take the waiter's kitten with her—but he would not sell it.

"Then where has she gone?" Mary exclaimed.

But Hugh could not tell her that. "She may not even be in England," he said wearily. "She took the passport you got her for Paris—or at least we can't find it among the things she left."

Mary sank back on the cushions of Louise's brougham, feeling almost defeated. The sight of Louise braced her. The old lady was furious with her niece. A little afraid that Mary would reproach her, she denounced Sylvia vigorously, her displeasure growing when she saw that Mary was unmoved.

"Deceitful young idiot!" she cried. "I should have been thrashed by my father for a trick like this, and I advise you to get her back and apply the same remedy, my dear Mary."

"I didn't ask you for your advice, and I can't conceive myself needing it," Mary said, with a light but alarming assurance.

"What did you say?" The harsh intimidating old voice sank weakly. Hugh frowned. "This has shocked Louise," he remarked.

"She must hold her tongue about my daughter," Mary said implacably, "unless she has anything civil to say." She added gently: "I beg your pardon, my dear Louise. But Sylvia is my child and I am the person to deal with her."

"She's Hugh's child, too, I suppose," Louise whispered.

Mary smiled. Her glance, tired and humorous, held Louise's for a moment of perfect understanding. "You're an angry old woman and a silly old woman," she said softly, "to suppose that I'd blame you for Sylvia's foolishness, or allow you to tell me what I ought to do with her."

She stood up. "May I go to my room?" she asked wearily. "All this is no use."

Louise's eyes gleamed. "Nothing's much use now," she said triumphantly. "It's all very fine to talk about what you'll do with her. But you haven't caught her yet." She chuckled. "And she'll maybe not thank you when you do."

Hugh said quietly: "I think that's enough."

Mary's glance moved slowly from one to the other. "Oh you *Herveys*," she said. A hostile smile flickered in her eyes. She turned round and marched from the room in silence.

With some difficulty, Louise held her tongue until the door had closed. Then she said mildly: "Are you dining with me, Hugh?"

He shook his head. Stooping slightly—he was tired and Louise had been trying—he went off, leaving her to purge her anger on her servants: they were hardened to it and would know how to deal with her.

London, as he stepped out into Berkeley Square, was at its most enchanting hour of dusk when, in June, it lingers for a few moments in a light that has the quality of brown still water: in this subtle and deceitful light a few objects stand out with startling clearness, the bronzed green leaves of trees just inside the Park, the corner of a high building, a girl's light dress, the flutter of scarlet from the geraniums in a solitary window-box. Hugh turned into Piccadilly as the first lights came out across the Green Park. A hansom cab, rounding the corner at a sharp trot, almost cut him down as it swung into the tide moving —towards the Circus and Leicester Square—side by side with the broader, statelier stream of carriages setting west to flow round the great houses and the lovely quiet squares between Bond Street and the Park. The splendid pageant of London in the eighties—which none of its watchers appreciated better than this Londoner who by a subtle irony spent most of his time forcing the growth of a

new hostile age and a society that would obliterate all traces of this one—with its unhurried magnificence and its raffish undercurrent, moved past him as he hesitated at the corner of Devonshire House. At last he turned east and plunged into a current that swept him across Piccadilly Circus, along Coventry Street, and round the north side of Leicester Square to the Moorish elegancies of the Alhambra. He sank into his comfortable seat just as the *première danseuse* gave way to the *corps de ballet*, and an excited old gentleman at his side began a monologue that opened : " Damme, sir, I knew her when——" Hugh closed his eyes and let the tide of reminiscence flow gently over him. He was more worried by Sylvia's disappearance than Mary herself, since he had none of Mary's rooted disbelief in the possibility of disaster overtaking her and hers. She was so confident of being equal to life that a little of her certitude overflowed into her anxiety for Sylvia. Sylvia was only a child—but she was Mary Hervey's daughter, and *must*, Mary felt, triumph in that sign.

Hugh was not so arrogant and more sceptical. He had, too, the prevision to wonder whether Sylvia would not be worse off if Ling had married her than if he had not. It was fantastically unlikely that he had not. The girl was a considerable heiress—and a beauty. Hatred of Captain Ling swept over him, a paroxysm of rage and bitterness. If he could have killed the fellow—but that would not help Sylvia. She was gone, a little girl lost. He half turned his head, to glance upwards, as if he expected to catch sight of a young frightened face among the ambiguous shadows of the promenade. The whispered confidences of the old gentleman suddenly exasperated him. He got up and pushed his way out into the Square, which was making the most of the shortest night of the year. The trees in its centre had become sylvan and mysterious, under a sky which had scarcely forgotten one day in its uneasy foreboding of the next. A yellow light, flooding

the pavement, beat back the darkness of little side streets, from one of which a young woman emerged suddenly, gathering up her dress as she stepped into the glittering tide. Hugh pulled his cape round him, tilted his hat, and followed her idly through the crowd. She showed that she had noticed him and he dropped back, surprised by the feverish irritability of his body and mind. He wanted rest, but not of so brief and self-murderous a kind. Why then had he followed her? Wearily he turned from himself and began to walk quickly. He was soon in unfamiliar streets, and for a long time he walked with a complete lack of direction through the labyrinth of streets and squares south of the river. At last he found that he had turned back.

At the corner of Vauxhall Bridge he stood watching an old man arranging a small shabby stall. The trembling solicitude with which he worked over it exhausted him, and he stood still, his arms hanging loosely, his eyes fixed and hopeless, as if exploring a future that whether it produced customers or not would produce nothing worth waiting for. And yet he waited. A moment of strange lucidity came to Hugh as he lingered—the face of life, mysterious and tormenting, looked over her shoulder at him with a smile: "I meant—but you see what I meant?" For a moment he did. The next he was dragging across the bridge, conscious of nothing but his extreme exhaustion.

Light sprang over London as he walked, a clear soft light in which every shuttered house and waiting tree was renewed. It was nearing four when he let himself into Louise's house. The door of his wife's bedroom was ajar, and he pushed it gently open. She was not, as he had thought she would be, asleep. At the sight of him she sat up in bed. He sat beside her and rested his head against her shoulder. She made one or two half-hearted attempts to talk to him and then burst into tears. He took her in his arms and tried to soothe her.

" I've never seen you like this," he said gently. It was not true. He had seen her cry with far more wildness and bitterness—but the occasion was not one he cared to remember. " Can't you find her for me, Hughie ? " she repeated. The appeal, so unlikely from her, and her use of his " little name " shook him. He stroked her face and talked to her until her tears ceased and she drew herself from his arms.

" You look tired to death," she exclaimed. " How selfish I am."

He smiled sweetly. " I don't mind. To tell you the truth, I like it. It isn't often you give me the chance to —comfort you. I like the sensation."

Mary's face wore a familiar air of surprise and pleasure. " If that is all you want——" she began doubtfully.

" It's not," Hugh said quickly. " I want everything you can't give me—confidence, and my life over again. Why, Mary, I'm forty-five, and I've done nothing." He stood up. " I must go. I can't keep awake any longer."

She lacked the courage to say : " Sleep here." He kissed her, pulling the blanket round her shoulders, and went away. But he had eased the dreadful tension of her mind and she fell asleep exactly as he had left her, her cheek resting on her hand.

CHAPTER TEN

THE cab that took Sylvia from the Green Park, where she met Ling, to the shabby little hotel in a street off the Strand, was old and incredibly musty, with straw under their feet. It was also very low, and at every jolt in the road, Sylvia's high rose-trimmed hat struck the roof and fell over her eye. She was radiantly happy. She sat on the edge of the seat with a great air of self-possession, and looked out of the window at every stop. When she reached the hotel and Ling handed her into its dingy hall, she tried to check a gesture of horror. He was paying the cabman, and did not see her dismay. Before he turned round she had had time to remind herself that the place mattered nothing : it was the beginning of her adventure, the rags she would presently throw off, revealing herself in all the glory of a wedding garment. On her way up the dark narrow staircase to the third floor she thought sadly of all the dresses she had been compelled to leave behind, any one of which would have made a better wedding dress than the one she was wearing, under a dark cape. She sighed and took her lover's arm, to console him for what he was missing.

He halted outside her bedroom, and taking her dressing-case from the bearded " boy," pushed open the door. The room was no worse than she had expected. She went in, followed by Ling. Their few meetings had all been out of doors, in fields or woods where her longing had dissipated itself in the spaces round them. Here, in this small room, isolated and shut away from the world, she felt everything changed. She wanted to sing or shout, she opened cupboards, ran to the window, flung her arms round Ling in a passion of love and excitement and to

persuade herself that there was nothing out of the way in their being here together.

"There's nobody," she stammered, "nobody in the world. I'm so happy."

He released her gently. No doubt he was moved—he had a real liking for her—but he was determined to keep his head. Seduction—of a cruder sort than that to which she had already succumbed—had no possible interest for him. He had had too many women too easily, and he had once been in love.

Sylvia looked at him in alarm. "Are you going already?"

He smiled at her. "But I'll come back for you later, my dear. You don't want me to stay here with you, do you? The chambermaid will help you, if you need anything and you ring for her."

The girl blushed, mortified by his smile and her own awkwardness. "I didn't expect you to stay," she said, with the haughty air of a child reproved in front of guests whom she does not like and who will laugh at her.

Her cheeks burned. Glancing at them, Ling felt a new mingling of pity and excitement. She was so young, still unhurt, and so reckless. If he had had her ten years ago—but then, ten years ago he was not the same person as now. To speculate on what his life would have been if she had offered herself to a much younger Rupert Ling was like wondering what it would feel like to have been born a Chinaman or a dwarf. Time was master in this world.

"Don't move," he said to her quietly. "I want to remember you like this." She glowed, in the dingy ill-lighted room, about which, given off by the walls themselves, clung a particular faint smell of cloth and sweat, as if it had not been able to rid itself of the cast-off selves of all those human beings who had slept a night or two in its shabby bed and left it one morning without regret. He kissed her again and turned to go. "I'll

come back in an hour and take you out to dinner," he said lightly.

When he had gone, she stood staring into the glass, as if to put herself in countenance. To avoid thinking of her ridiculous blunder, she unpacked her case and put her few things away with instinctive neatness—she was as methodical as Clara was awkward and untidy. The thought of dining with him outside the hotel alarmed her. It required a new sort of boldness; she had to remind herself that she had determined on adventure. At the same moment she saw herself as a young wife, presiding at her own table, and Sylvia Ling came to stiffen the backbone of Sylvia Hervey, now quaking in a bedroom on the third floor of a dubious London hotel. By the time a waiter knocked at her door to tell her that "the gentleman was downstairs," she persuaded herself, poor child, that she was ready for anything.

Ling was standing with his back to the stairs as she came down into the hall. Her heart "turned round in her" at the sight of him: pride in his good looks and delight that this superb creature was hers, had chosen her, fought in her trembling body. She slipped her arm in his and walked with him past the curious eyes of the clerk, trying in this way to pretend that she was neither nervous nor visible. He beckoned a hansom and helped her in: she poked her head round the hood and drew it back to say, with a breathless chuckle: "I must look wicked enough—sitting in a hansom with you!"

"Do you want to look wicked?" he asked her, amused.

"No. Yes. I don't mind. Everything is all right when you are here."

Again he would have been sorry for her if he had not already begun to wonder how he could fit her in with a new excitement. "A friend of mine is dining with us," he said abruptly. "I ran across him yesterday. His name is Lengard, Georges Lengard—a Belgian. I daresay he's the only friend I have in the world. I did

something for him once—by accident—and he chose to remember it."

She felt a sharp pang of disappointment. "Why did you ask him ?" she exclaimed. She was vexed as well as disappointed, and since she had never learned to hide her feelings, showed it. Ling looked at her with a smile.

"Don't be angry, Sylvie," he said softly.

She felt the uselessness of arguing with him, and gave in. He was too much for her, and in her heart she liked him for it. When the hansom drew up, she sprang out and walked into the restaurant with an air of dignity, a replica, childish and comical, of Mary Hervey's, which she was far from feeling. She imagined that everyone was looking at her. At the same time, she gazed round her with an avid curiosity : the long room, lined with plush seats, backed by mirrors, and divided from each other by green and gold caryatids that reminded her of the figure-heads on her mother's ships, was blazing with light from six monstrous chandeliers, their glass and bronze lustres tinkling faintly in the vibration from the street. She followed Ling to a table at the far end, from which, as they approached, a man got up and stood waiting. Georges Lengard. She glanced at him sharply and saw a broad pale melancholy face, black eyes under thick arched brows—a secretive un-English face to which she took an irrational dislike. What he saw is worth recording : a thin childish figure and a delicate narrow face between folds of dark hair—her skin was the clearest he had ever seen and her eyes widely-opened and brilliant—Sylvia Hervey at eighteen, in that moment when her young fresh beauty, still to a fleeting gaze as flawless as a child's, was touched, irradiated, with a hint of change, as if the emotions of the past few weeks had been at work to sharpen the lines of her face, cloud the clearness of her glance, and give to her whole body a new assurance under which her angular and childish gracefulness was disappearing, like the original of a portrait blurred by successive retouchings.

Lengard's dull melancholy eyes, fixed on her from the other side of the table, irritated her. He noticed it and said hurriedly: "I didn't mean to stare at you, Miss Hervey. It is a bad habit of mine. I beg your pardon."

"Georges remembers everyone he has ever seen," Ling said. "He photographs their faces on his brain."

"There is no need for him to remember mine," Sylvia said stiffly.

Ling glanced lazily at her, and turned to the waiter. He ordered her dinner without asking her what she wanted to eat. She was grateful, and gave him a dazzling smile. He bent over her to say in a cheerful voice: "What d'you think of it, Sylvie? Like it, eh?"

"Yes," she said doubtfully. She looked about her, avoiding the equivocal and appraising glances of the women at the next table. "What extraordinary dresses some of the women are wearing. They're quite old, too—thirty, at least." She turned her head, and stared at her neighbours, trampling on them with her youth and her cruel charm. All these women were as much at home here as she was a visitor (of a class and a type to which they were not used), but she stared at them with a bright impersonal interest, as if they and not she were the "curiosity." She had none of that simplicity of heart which made Mary Hervey, for all her natural dignity, the friendliest creature in the world.

She did not like the place. As the dinner progressed she liked it less and less. Ling drank two bottles of burgundy to his own cheek and laid his arm across her shoulders in an affectionate gesture. She moved aside, and he laughed at her with boyish impudence. He was genuinely amused. A dark flame of mischief smouldered in him; he could not keep quiet: he flung his long restless body back in his seat, leaned forward again to whisper in Lengard's ear, hummed, broke into a roar of laughter. Sylvia was uneasy and ashamed. For the first time she realised that she had no influence over him:

he did not "mind" her, as the saying is, in the least thing. At last she gave him up, and sat with a calm face and a fast-beating heart, longing to be out of it.

Lengard leaned over the table and spoke suddenly.

"You're not eating."

"I'm not hungry," she said coldly.

"Surely you don't eat only when you're hungry?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

She did not answer him. She thought he must be a little mad—he was certainly ill-bred—and she would have nothing to do with him. Not the least of his crimes was that he sympathised with her. He saw through her pretence to the frightened girl behind. She tried to freeze him. Tears rose behind her eyes and she managed to keep them back. Why—she tried to smile—she was an experienced woman already! Lengard looked at her with a strange gentle delicacy which held at the same time no pity for her. This brooding melancholy man was capable of shocking cruelties, but he disliked the sight of unhappiness and avoided it whenever he could. He tapped Ling on the arm.

"Miss Hervey is tired," he said gently.

Ling gave her a bright empty stare. "Aren't you happy?" he demanded.

"Don't speak so loudly," she whispered. "No, I'm not. Please let us go home now."

Ling continued to stare at her flushed cheeks. At last he straightened himself abruptly. "Come along then," he said good-humouredly, "I'll take you home. Wait here, Georges, I'll come back and we'll go over things again."

What things had they to go over? Sylvia wondered. An obscure instinct, one of those inner voices that when a name, the name of a place or a person, falls on our ears for the first time, warn us that it is significant for us, prompted her to find out about these "things"—quickly. Meanwhile, the experienced woman shuddered at the prospect

of walking down the long room again, picking her way between the tables that barred her path to the door ; as she rounded each one she felt that the next would betray her, she would find her path round it blocked by chairs and have to retreat and escape another way. If that happened, she would die of shame. Her knees felt weak. She shrank from the boisterous gaiety with which Ling helped her into the cab. At the same time she despised herself for feeling like this—she was eighteen, a grown woman : if the evening had been a failure it must surely have been her own fault. Ling drew her against his shoulder and said genially : " Why, you're shaking. What is it, child ? " Her silence struck him : and he went on gently : " You're tired. I ought to have taken you away earlier. What a thoughtless brute I am. I shall have to learn to look after you, I'm not used to this sort of thing, you know."

" You needn't look after me," she said haughtily.

Ling turned her face up to his and examined it soberly. Rays of light from the street lamps fell across it, following each other in the darkness of the cab like the ripples of light and shadow across a field of long grass.

" I'm not so sure about that," he said gravely. " How old are you, please ? Eighteen or forty-eight ? "

Her pride melted suddenly. She clung to him, her slender body lax and convulsed with sobs. Her disappointment, her feeling of youth and inexperience, all the unconfessed strain of the day and the evening, rose suffocatingly in her throat. Ling put both arms round her and waited patiently while she struggled to control herself. Then he dried her tears and put her hat straight. " You mustn't cry like that," he said gently. " I can't stand it. It makes me want to jump out of the cab and run."

Sylvia leaned gratefully against his shoulder. " All right. I won't," she said.

Her confidence in him was restored : even the flavour of wine and cigar smoke about him did not displease her ;

it was part of his mysterious, irresistible, and masculine charm, which she loved and to which she had succumbed at the beginning. How far away that beginning was. The memory of Richard's dance floated across her mind, a remote tiny picture, in which only the figures of herself and Ling had any colour of life. A pleasant languor crept over her. The yellow lamplight dazzled her eyes ; she pressed her face against Ling's shoulder to avoid being jerked away from him by the jolting of the cab.

In the hall of the hotel, as dank and gloomy as an underground burrow, one lean gas jet was doing night duty for the whole house. The porter had a reproachful air. Much Sylvia cared for him ! She flung her arms round Ling, and then sprang away from him, up the stairs, with an incredible quickness and lightness. On the first landing she paused and thrust her rosy face and half her body over the railings into the shaft of light issuing from below. Her lips formed words he could not hear.

She pulled off her clothes and got into bed. When she was a little girl and had upset the whole house by one of her rages she hurried past her mother's door at night, to avoid having to go in and confess her wickedness. Now she hurried past the image of her mother, detaching itself reproachfully from the shadows of her mind—that mother whose gestures her body, more dutiful than her mind, copied as faithfully as it could. She tried to think of herself returning, as Mrs. Rupert Ling, to confound everyone with her happiness. Suddenly she fell asleep.

In the morning the sun shone into her room ; she sang as she dressed. Afraid to go in search of the coffee room she rang the bell, and asked for her breakfast to be brought to her upstairs. It came, and it was uninviting. She pushed it out of sight under a chest of drawers where, judging by the successive layers of dust and junk already existing, it probably remained for another ten years until the hotel was pulled down and replaced by a block of offices in the Italianate manner. Her Yorkshire soul

revolted. She packed her bag, and sat down in front of the glass, tilting her hat over her forehead with a frowning interest. She was so absorbed that she did not hear the click of the door. Ling's face, appearing over her shoulder in the glass, sent a shock of terror through her. She turned pale and sprang up.

"Why didn't you speak?" she said reproachfully.

"I knocked *and* looked in," he said, grinning boyishly. "You were too busy to notice me."

Half her pleasure in seeing him was spoiled by the disordered room and unmade bed. "Why did you come up here?" she exclaimed. "I'd rather have come down. My bag's packed and I'm ready to go out."

She waited, hoping that he would say at once :. "We're going to be married at ten o'clock," or "this afternoon" —it had to happen some time to-day, and the sooner the better. She would feel safer married. Instead he drew her across the room to the window and pulled her on to his knee. She sat stiffly, poised ready to spring away, not liking it.

"I've news for you," he said boisterously. "Can you stand another surprise?"

She was learning—queer lessons—to distrust his air of sardonic cheerfulness. "What is it?" she asked quietly.

"It takes longer to get married in England than I thought," he said. "It seems I've done the wrong things. I'm not used to marrying."

No one gets married every day, she thought bitterly. "What is to happen then?" she said coldly. "You might have found this out before. I needn't have run away in such a hurry, after all." Her glance fell on her bag, waiting, locked, in the middle of the room. "I can't stay here," she cried passionately. "I won't. It's too squalid." She felt that her life was being ruined by Ling's carelessness.

"You needn't stay here," he said pleasantly. "There's a much better plan. We can go over to Dieppe on the

afternoon boat and get the British consul to marry us at once. Don't look so startled, Mrs. Ling—you will have to be prepared for sudden changes when you live with me. You knew that, didn't you ? " He watched her to see how she would take it.

She took it quietly, frowning and tapping her foot. " I don't want to go away before I'm married," she said. Her resentment broke out afresh. " How could you be so careless, Rupert ? I don't understand you ! "

" Don't try." The line of her face from brow to jaw, seen from his angle, gave him a shock of surprise : he was tumbled a quarter of a century backwards to the moment in which Mary Roxby, mortally offended, had walked away from him with just so obstinate an air. " What a stubborn creature you are ! " he exclaimed. " Are you always going to argue with me, Sylvie ? "

The girl hesitated. " How long will it be before we can be married here ? "

" Three weeks."

" And in Dieppe ? "

" At once," Ling said lightly. " What are consuls for ? "

A feeling of despair seized her. She had now no one in the world but this man. To go back was impossible. She had cut herself off from every other person. He *must* behave as if he were what she thought him. Anything less would be the end of her. She turned her head to look down at him ; his face wore a familiar mischievous smile, his eyes met hers in a glance of ironic affection. She seized his arm. " You are real, aren't you," she said sorrowfully. " You're all I have."

" That ought to please you," he said imperturbably. " Aren't you satisfied with me, Mrs. Ling ? "

Sighing, she put her arms round his neck and lifted her face. Delicious moment of surrender ! His smile vanished.

She had never been so yielding, so abandoned to his

caresses, and yet—beneath her gentleness, hidden even from herself—she was nursing an implacable desire to punish him. Next time she would be firm. Next time—ah! She slipped from his grasp and said breathlessly : " Is it time ? "

Ling looked at his watch. " We shall have to hurry to the station," he said. " I had no idea it was so late."

" You'll be late for your own wedding," she jeered, laughing at him. " And what about your luggage ? "

He glanced at her quickly. " I took it to the station before I came for you."

She followed him downstairs in silence. The knowledge that he had been so sure of her struck coldly across her mind. She could not draw back. She forced herself to think well of him. The cab hurried them along the Embankment, and she saw the river for the first time. She felt a spring of pure pleasure. Fine swords of light clashed and quivered over it in the sunshine.

" Why do I like rivers so much ? " she asked childishly.

Ling smiled. " Do you ? I've seen rivers that make the Thames look like a beck. Real mystery rivers."

She repeated the phrase in delight. " Can't I see them ? "

The same mischievous smile flickered in his eyes. " Why not ? "

At Newhaven the sight of Georges Lengard standing on the quay gave her a shock. He took off his hat to her with an air of profound respect. She scarcely glanced at him. Ling, to her unspoken relief, passed him without speaking. On board the little boat, which stank of lamp oil and new ropes, Ling advised her to go below and see the stewardess. " Ask her to give you a bunk in case you feel ill. You'd better tell her your husband is on deck." She went obediently. The thought crossed her mind that he was getting rid of her. Georges Lengard, that stiff melancholy man, began to throw his shadow over her day as he had thrown it over her first evening with her

lover. But for a time she forgot him. The boat moved out, with a prolonged creaking shudder, and she began to feel uneasy. The stewardess, a formidable and bosomy woman, smiled broadly at her white face. Sylvia tried to smile in response, but she felt wretchedly ill. Soon she was ill in dire fact, so ill that she supposed she was dying, and clung to the woman with both hands. "Don't leave me," she gasped, "oh—please!"

"Eh, you're not going this time," the woman exclaimed, in perfect good humour. She was sorry for the forlorn young creature; she clasped her firmly, lifting the hair off her damp forehead and buoying her up with drops of brandy, which she made the girl suck from the end of her finger. "There's my pretty," she murmured, in a satisfied voice. But at last she was alarmed.

"Is your father on deck?" she asked sharply.

Sylvia shook her head. "No one is with me." She could not bring herself to say that she was married: it might be a bad omen—and she was ringless. The woman grumbled loudly to the other occupants of the cabin. "Disgraceful—sending the bairn over alone." She looked at Sylvia curiously. "There'll be someone to meet you, I hope?"

The girl nodded. Beneath her wretchedness, she was shocked by the readiness with which she had lied. She hated lying—it made her feel inferior to the person she was deceiving. She pushed the stewardess away, and sat up, propping her head on her hand. Shouts and the trampling of feet overhead warned her that they were nearing Dieppe. "Wait a few minutes," the woman said hurriedly, "and I'll come back for you and see you off the boat." She disappeared. Feeling dazed and foundering, Sylvia made her way on deck.

Her appearance startled Ling. She was anxious to get off the boat before the stewardess came to look for her: she dragged him towards the gangway and pushed past the

people in front of her without even seeing them. Once on the quay, she leaned dizzily against a corner of the shed. Lengard hovered solicitously at her side. "If you don't send that man away," she said loudly to Ling, "I shall go back to England on this boat."

Almost he thought it was the best thing she could do. He had no idea how to help her: he was sorry for her, but he felt bored and impatient at the same time. She knew what he was feeling, and forced herself to smile. His relief was almost comical.

"You'd better go to bed," he said gently.

"I shall be all right in an hour," she whispered. "I never felt like this before."

He took her to a small yellow-faced hotel behind the harbour and handed her over to the *patronne*, a lean rosy creature of no age, with a tongue that darted in and out between her lips like a snake. Sylvia's head swam. She was glad when the Frenchwoman, after flickering round the room for some minutes, at last flickered out, and left her. She pushed her dressing-case out of sight and flung herself on the bed—not without throwing a disparaging glance from the tiny window into the courtyard at the back of the hotel, where two almost naked children rolled each other on the edge of a stagnant drain. Her lip curled. She despised the French already. They were a feckless untidy lot.

An hour's sleep, and her own vitality, restored her. She got up, and went out into the surprising afternoon. It was as French as the air. The sun, lying hot and yellow over the dusty pavements, brought out a different un-English smell. Blue-bloused workmen, with stunted bodies and clean faces, the socks and bare knees of tall schoolboys, the un-English lettering on the walls and over the shops, enchanted her. Over all there was an air of gaiety, even in poverty: only the French, she thought, are truly *gay*.

She turned a corner and came upon Ling and Georges

Lengard seated under an awning at one of half a dozen small tables placed outside a café—*the Café du Soleil*, it was. It had tawny ragged sunflowers and scarlet geraniums in boxes on either side of the door. Mr. Lengard greeted her with a solemn movement of his arm and took himself off.

" I distrust that man," she whispered to Ling.

He looked at her queerly. " Let's go back to your hotel," he suggested. " I have something to tell you." He spoke casually, but she felt a fresh misgiving, as if he had warned her to prepare for one of those " sudden changes " of his. She fought against a feeling of excitement as she walked beside him through the narrow street. If he had looked for questions he was disappointed. Even when they reached the *Hôtel de l'Europe*—what large ideas these foreigners have, she thought irrelevantly : an inn is the hotel of Europe and a cell-like café the sun—and he had hurried her up the staircase, as steep and dark as a shaft sunk in the earth, she said nothing. He shut the door of her small bedroom and leaned against it, at a loss, frowning, his hands in his pockets. At last she took pity on him, and said calmly :

" Is anything wrong ? "

Her voice re-assured him. " Why—nothing," he said jauntily. " How much do you love me, Sylvie ? "

She gave him a strange calculating glance, as if she were summing him up once and for all. Did he know what he was saying, she wondered ? Didn't he know that his question—if it meant anything at all—meant something uncommonly insulting ? He could not possibly be so stupid as that.

" What am I doing here, then ? " she asked ironically.

" Oh, that," he said easily. " But do you love me enough to do *anything* for me ? That's what I want to know."

She sat down with her back to the window and folded her hands. Her attitude was childish and patient, as if

she were a child trying to cope with the stupidity of a grown-up person. At the same time, she felt baffled. She was in the dark, moving blindly towards an understanding of him.

"What do you want me to do?" she said cautiously.

He made an impatient sound. "Now I know that you're Mary Hervey's daughter," he exclaimed.

"Tell me what you want." A smile lifted her mouth. If he would only tell her what he wanted of her, how gladly she would give it to him. She could not move in the dark. She *could* not. Some quality in her, stronger even than her longing to please him, made her delay, made her insist on dragging him into the open. I must understand, she said to herself. "I want nothing except to help you," she said smilingly.

"You can help me if you choose," he answered. "I've had an extraordinary piece of luck. I told you Georges Lengard felt he owed me something. Well, he's paid—in full."

"Paid?" she repeated, puzzled. "Do you mean he has given you some money?"

"Better than that. He's brought me a piece of news that hardly a soul in England, except the two of us, knows. In a few weeks' time they'll all know it. There's *gold* in the Transvaal, Sylvie—you don't know where that is. Never mind. It's in Africa. There'll be the biggest rush in history when it comes out. And I know about it now. Can't you see? We've got to get there as quick as we can." He was flushed with suppressed excitement. "God bless me, girl, don't you understand me?"

Actually, she did not. The whole thing had for her a disreputable and doubtful air. She had inherited, without being aware of it, a contempt for the unusual and the speculative which tormented her all her life because of its struggle with the unusual in her fate and her nature. She frowned, realising that he was excited, and unable to follow him.

Her mind made a sudden leap forward, and she saw the full meaning of what he was saying.

" Do you want us to go there, then ? " she said bluntly.

His face cleared. " That's my girl," he cried. " Now I can talk to you. A London-owned boat is leaving Havre for Cape Town to-morrow—Lengard knows her captain. We shall have to get you some things. The shops in Havre aren't up to much, I'm afraid, but they'll do."

She cut him short, going straight for her mark. " Shall we be married here or in Havre, Rupert ? "

He crossed the room and put his arms round her. " We can do better than either," he said patiently. " The captain can marry us on board. English territory, eh ? You'll have to ship as my wife—any other way, there'd be questions asked—and explain afterwards. If you didn't look so ridiculously young—never mind, we'll work it all right."

She turned away from him, too stunned for the moment to answer him. He must be mad to ask her to do such a thing. Ship as a married woman, and explain afterwards —explain what ? Her cheeks flamed. She felt a dreadful inner anguish—as if what he said had penetrated her mind to her body. The very wildness of his proposal revolted her. All her obstinacy, her proud hard sense, the instincts of generations of stubborn-minded Gartons and Hansykes, were roused against him now—when it was too late. They were roused against herself, too. She had been mad. To come here at all had been mad. She had behaved like any silly emotional girl, and thought herself brave and adventurous. She saw herself with a frightful clarity. She realised, for the first, perhaps for the only time in her life, that she had been born with a fatal and piteous quality, an unreliability of soul—akin to that mysterious impulse in some ships which arranges from the very day of their launching, and before that, when they are still building, that they shall kill and drown men and

finally by some clumsy gesture murder themselves—a quality which at no distant moment in her life would thrust her irresistibly along the one path she ought not to follow. Perhaps she realised too, in the same obscure region of her mind, that she would pass this quality on to her children, or to one of them, since she felt a sudden impulse to get rid of herself, to run away, to force herself out of life—now, before she did any more mischief to herself or others.

Ling's voice brought her back to the hot foreign little room. She did not hear what he said, but she turned round and spoke calmly.

"You know I couldn't do that."

Ling frowned. "Why not?"

"It's impossible," she repeated firmly. "I couldn't go with you unless we were married."

"Then what do you propose to do?" he asked ironically. "After all, you've come as far as this."

She leaned against the window and eyed him silently. It was true. She had been a fool—but she meant her folly to stop here.

"Haven't you?" he persisted.

She shook her head, looking at him with a hurt helpless stare, as if she saw nothing. Actually, she was watching and listening intently. She was hurt, but she meant to hear every word he said, so that she would know where she stood. He argued with her, scolding and coaxing her in turns. Her face quivered, but she did not budge from her refusal. He kissed her. She stood passively until he was tired. He could do nothing with her. At last he realised that he had struck rock, the rock covered by those light dancing waters in which for so long he had seen nothing but his own reflection. His impatience got the better of him. After all, he thought irritably, she must see that he was treating her as considerately as possible.

"I can't and won't wait to marry you, Sylvie. The

consular formalities will take a fortnight—anything might happen in that time. If you want to come with me at all you must come as you are. After all, what are you shying at? The delay? Being married by the captain? I assure you it's quite legal."

"You knew all this when you brought me here," she exclaimed. "You never meant the consul to marry us. That's true, isn't it?"

Her insistence angered him. "If it is," he said sullenly, "you're as much responsible for it as I am. You were ready enough to come with me."

She felt nothing at the moment but a vague excitement, that suspension of the faculties which follows a sudden blow: the mind feverishly questions the body: "Are you hurt? how badly are you hurt?" and the body cannot at first reply. But a moment later, and with as much anguish as if she were still his young trustful lover, she realised that everything was finished.

It was all over. She had been an even greater fool than she supposed. All those fine qualities of his—his candour, his tenderness, his truth—in which she had believed so firmly that nothing anyone had told her about him could have touched her, did not exist at all. He was shameless; he did not care what she suffered. She had nothing left, no lover—curiously enough, she did not understand yet that she might have no husband—her adventure had turned to farce. She swallowed the tears that the young girl she despised would persist in forcing to her eyes and said coldly:

"I made a mistake."

He was sorry for the stubborn young creature. Perhaps he was even a little ashamed of himself. He might have warned her—as he had once warned Mary Roxby—that he could not "endure being trusted . . . no one in Danesacre trusts a Ling. They know us too well." He knew himself very well. But he had so little time left in which to argue with her—and she was incredibly

obstinate. Like her mother, like the Mary Roxby whom he had tricked and who had defeated him when they were both young. The two moments, that one and this, hung for a second in his mind, side by side, two iridescent bubbles suspended in the irony of time : they touched, quivered, and were shattered, in a little spirt of laughter. He sobered at once.

" Try to understand," he said slowly. " This will mean a fortune for me—for both of us. Can't you see it, my dear ? "

" I can't see anything," Sylvia said, " except that you don't care what becomes of me. My mother was quite right—you are selfish and unreliable." As she said this, she leaned back in dismay from the gulf that opened in her thoughts. She was frantic with dismay and terror. She wanted to save herself and did not know how. At this moment a boy's voice tried over a line of song in the little courtyard, broke off, began again and recalled the whole verse : the air was strung on the bright quivering sunshine. She never forgot it.

" If your mother had behaved reasonably, we'd be married now," Ling pointed out. And that's true, he thought in surprise. He was always surprised when the counters his adroit brain produced for the purposes of the game turned out to be real coins. After all, the whole business was Mary's fault. He had been willing to settle down—why, he had meant to plant a park, with a double avenue of foreign trees for his son to admire. The thought of the overseas trees he would have thrust into the English soil moved in him, a deep slow current. He would have made the girl a proper husband—yes, and given the restless spirit in her something to bite on.

It was gone, the moment when he might have settled down, and a familiar restlessness had caught up with him. Let this chance go—send Lengard off alone—the thought was intolerable. He must go. Not for the gold—the gold was the excuse, the sign—but for appeasement.

" Your mother is to blame for this," he repeated.

" Are you punishing me for that ? " she asked sadly.

" No. Don't be silly. But you're more like her than I bargained for. Except that Mary never loses her temper. And was never quite silly enough to fall in love with me," he added, with a reflective grin, like a boy. There was a puckish quality in this middle-aged adventurer which he never lost : he was worthless but he was not cheap. He was selfish, unreliable, dishonest, and airy.

Sylvia turned on him in uncontrolled fury, her thin childlike body thrust forward, her eyes blazing. She would never forgive him for what he had just said, never. It was no worse than the other things he had said, but it was unforgivable. She shook with anger.

" Go away now," she stammered. " I don't want to see you."

He was taken aback. He did not want, if he had to leave her, to leave her like this. Yet her anger stiffened him against her. As well take a wild cat with him as take this undisciplined young creature. " Why are you so unreasonable ? " he said wearily.

" Are you going ? " Sylvia repeated. " Or do you want me to have you turned out of my room ? "

He grinned. " I shouldn't try that," he said. " Do you know that you'll never see me again ? "

" Only go and leave me alone."

" Very well," he said indifferently. " I haven't any time to waste if I'm to get that ship. But what are you going to do ? You'd better catch the morning boat."

He opened the door and turned to look at her. He was surprised to find that he could not go easily. He felt a fool. Why am I letting her off like this ? he thought sullenly : I ought to have had her and settled all this nonsense. He took a step back into the room. For a moment the cloud of his irritation and resentment lifted and he saw her clearly, a trembling girlish figure, and alone. A sudden unexpected weakness came over him.

What was a fortnight, after all ?—he could wait that long. Let Georges go ahead and follow him in a fortnight. Why not ?

"Sylvie . . ."

She could only misunderstand him. His blinded gaze frightened her. She did not know that she was as near being married as outraged ; she only knew that he was aware of her again, and dangerous. Besides, she was finished—she could stand no more, no more arguments, no more unkindness. She was too humiliated, too hurt. He must leave her alone.

If she could have broken down, shed a few tears. But she never cried when tears would have helped her : she was usually too busy despising her antagonist. She looked at him sullenly. " Do you want my mother to buy you off ? " she asked him in a loud jeering voice.

He turned round and left her. He was never to see her again. But his conscience had not quite done with him. Seated under a smoking lamp in a Havre café that night, he wrote a short letter to Mary. It was as much like him as anything he ever did—shameless, inexcusable, and direct. That he forgot to post it was more like him. He found it in a pocket book six months later, at a moment of disaster and despair, and laughed until the tears ran down his face.

" My dear Mary—I shall have sailed for Cape Town before you read this. You'd better fetch your girl from the *Hôtel de l'Europe* in Dieppe as quickly as possible. I'd have taken her with me, but she was too much for me. She's undamaged, except in her feelings, and those will recover, with time and a husband. You'd have done better to let me have her when I wanted her. Now what you and my dear fat brother George call my instability has got the better of my good intentions. I daresay you'll never forgive me for this. I'd have married her if she'd been willing to risk it."

Was that the truth ? He thought it was, but for his life could not have sworn to it truthfully. Marriage—

stripped of the attractions it had had when he saw himself planting trees in his own piece of Yorkshire earth—alarmed him. Cynically he gave himself the benefit of the doubt. It was the girl's own fault.

He wondered casually what she had done when he left her.

She had thrown herself on the floor, in obedience to an unconscious sense of fitness. The floor was the right place for a lost deserted creature. Her tears were spontaneous, like the tears of a shocked child. She was terrified by the finality of what had happened. She was now utterly alone and defeated. There was nothing she could do to help herself or put things right. She wept, with the dreadful hopelessness of a child.

At last, because she had nothing more to fear, she reached a kind of quiescence. Her tears ceased. Still she lay obstinately on the floor, as if to move would be in some way to make less of her state. A footstep on the stairs made her start up quickly, thinking of her blotched face. The steps passed her door. She got to her feet and moved mechanically about the room, attending to her dress and her hair. That done, she sat down in the window and looked about her, to see what was left. Something very like exultation sprang up in her : the worst possible thing had happened—it gave her a feeling almost of exhilaration. But a moment later she felt baffled again. What was she to do now ? She glanced round the room, in which, for the moment, she felt safe. She locked the door. This was now her one refuge.

Another thought sent her flying across the room to look for her purse under the clothes in her dressing-case. She had more money than she expected—nearly ten pounds—and while she was going through it she saw for the first time a little heap of paper on the floor by the door. She stooped for it—five hundred-franc notes. He had placed them there in that final moment when she had shut her eyes to avoid seeing him go. Her first impulse, to

tear them up and scatter the pieces from the window, was followed by another—more typical of that Sylvia Hervey who would, if she could, have saved herself from this pother in a shoddy French hotel. She turned up her petticoat and sewed the notes into its hem. Never having starved, she could not conceive herself starving, but the thought that they were there, safely hidden, gave her a little feeling of security. She fastened her purse into her pocket and sat down in the window again.

Something must be done—but what? Her pride was suffering acutely. She could hardly bear to look at herself. She shook with loathing of the figure she cut. She could not go back to face her mother and Louise. Then what could she do? She beat her hands on the window frame in a frenzy. She felt trapped, desperate. Insensibly, her glance was caught and held by a strip of the harbour lying between two houses—bright broken water. The masts of a sailing ship flashed the last messages of the dying sun, and on the pavement below the window young work-girls were strolling in twos and threes, with bare shining heads and flowers at their throats. A girl and a young man passed, arm in arm, shy and yet calm, each aware of the other as of an unsolved mystery, and smiling, confident, untouched. Why am I not that girl? Sylvia thought in anguish. She was filled with pity for herself. An impulse drove her out into the mysterious foreign evening. She sauntered along, unconscious of the glances she provoked, her mind exhausting itself in desperate fancies.

As she passed a narrow alley between high walls a dreadful object in a tattered képi, with neither arms nor legs, its stump of a body fastened to a sort of hassock, spoke to her in rapid whining idiom. She looked at it once, unthinkingly, and started away in dislike. The object followed her, rolling itself over and over at her heels with incredible speed. She began to run, and flew, shaking with fear, down the long street past the shuttered

houses, the grotesque thuds slackening behind her. At last she darted through another alley into the street where two hours ago she had come on Ling and Mr. Lengard under the awning of the *Café du Soleil*. As she approached it again, a man rose from one of the little tables and stood in front of her with his cap in his hand. She stood still, trembling. Captain Russell's handsome heavy face wavered and receded. She turned pale and sat down hurriedly on the chair he drew out for her. As she recovered herself she felt exquisitely embarrassed. She got up to go, and sat down again. She did not know what to say to the man.

Captain Russell was not in the least embarrassed.

He called a waiter and ordered her a cup of coffee. "You'd better take a few drops of cognac with it," he said easily. "Brandy is the only thing to keep the stomach right in these French towns, if you don't mind my saying so. I was told it by the Queen's own doctor."

Sylvia smiled involuntarily at the notion that her Majesty's doctor had interested himself in Captain Russell's stomach. His kindness touched her. She sipped her cognac and felt grateful to him for ordering it and for having imposed his heavy sun-tanned face and tall body between her and the foreign street. Yet it was an agony to her to speak to him.

"I'm not sure whether you know," she said stiffly, "I came here to meet Captain Ling. We were to be married this afternoon." She forced herself to go on. "Unfortunately he had to leave suddenly. For the Transvaal, you know. Perhaps I shall go later."

Russell's face expressed no other emotion than a smooth interest, as though the disappearance of a man into the Transvaal, at the moment when he should have been getting married, were one of those things he insured against in the course of his business—like Jettisons, Surprisals, and Takings at Sea. He stroked his short thick moustache and said meditatively: "Last time I was

in Cape Town a woman came up to me in the street and offered me fifty pounds to take a package to London for her, for her aunt living in Hatton-garden. I laughed at her and told her to do her own smuggling. In the street, mark you. Ha, you can't be too careful, can you ? Ha. I shouldn't go to Cape Town if I were you, Miss Hervey."

Sylvia was overwhelmed with despair. Every word he said tortured her by its ghostly likeness to the truth. " I may not go," she said in a low voice.

Captain Russell's blue eyes rested on her with an odd gleam. " You'd better go home," he said abruptly.

" I'd rather drown myself in the harbour," she exclaimed.

He looked at her indulgently. " Very dispensatory," he murmured. " I shouldn't do that. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll lend you some books and you can tell me what you think of them. You'll have had a better education than I had—ha, I went to sea when I was thirteen, and my step-mother made me up a parcel with two pairs of socks and a pennorth of salt. I've been in most places since that morning—it was snowing, too—and seen as many women as I want to, but I never met a queerer woman anywhere. It's my opinion she was born with her tongue in her hand, so to speak. She says things make me wake up at night and ask myself if I really heard them. Ha."

Sylvia looked at him with interest. " Thirteen ! Weren't you very frightened ? "

He laughed, with a soft rich warmth. " Not I."

" I wish I'd been a boy," Sylvia exclaimed, sighing.

He looked at her tenderly. " A good thing you weren't. You've too much daintiness. I expect you can dance, eh ? And play the piano ? Now, I've learned everything I could teach myself—out of books, you understand—but I never learned either of those things. I might manage one, but the other——" He glanced at his feet with naive vanity. " They're all

right, but look at my fingers." He spread his hand out on the table in front of her, long square-tipped fingers, flexible and brown, and so scarred and thickened that they had a curious look of suffering. "I'd murder any tune with those, wouldn't I?" he murmured. He looked across at her with a hurt childish gaze, as if he expected her to comfort him.

She shrank from it, and yet she was profoundly moved. His simplicity attracted her. She felt that she was looking down into a clear pool, in which her glance discovered everything, every movement, every shadow. And yet—she was not sure. Had she, for all she had run away with one, learned very much about men? The one thing she could be sure of was that Captain Russell looked up to her and admired her. His attitude—he sat with his head bent towards her and his body stiffly upright—expressed admiration. His tall heavy body was stiff with it. He sat in his chair the embodiment of respectful manhood. She felt soothed and sustained. Yet he was helpless too, he had appealed to her. That pleased her. She felt a new pride in herself.

"Have you had a very lonely life?" she asked him gently.

"I suppose so," he said vaguely. "I haven't thought about it much."

The awning of the café was rolled up suddenly, to disclose a remote pale sky, in which the first stars gleamed thinly. Sylvia was startled. She had almost forgotten the *Hôtel de l'Europe.* Her bedroom there, which before she left it had seemed a refuge, now filled her with dismay, as if it had become a sinister place from which she would never get away. She could not imagine herself lying down to sleep in its bed. Yet where else could she go? She was seized with despair.

"I ought to go back now," she said dully.

He got up and shouted in a hectoring voice for his bill, over which he haggled with an air of profound contempt.

As they walked back towards the *Hôtel de l'Europe* he suggested to her that she dragged a piece of furniture across her door when she went to bed.

"You made a mistake in going there," he said delicately. "I'll call for you in the morning and take you to a woman I know in the town." He sighed. "Some women are more use than others," he observed, "and talk less."

She was not listening. As they came in sight of the harbour, now lying as if frozen in the faint ghostly light, she seized his arm.

"I didn't tell you the truth just now," she said angrily. "I ran away with Captain Ling in London. He said it would take too long to be married there. He said the British consul would marry us here at once. But actually he meant to go straight to Cape Town with a Mr. Lengard. He asked me this afternoon to sail with him, and be married on board by the captain—afterwards. I couldn't do it, and he went without me. There's no chance of my going to Cape Town. It's all over."

Her face quivered. She wanted to cry and at the same time she wanted to watch the effect of her words on him. She wanted him to be sympathetic, but without pitying her. In her heart, she was waiting for him to work a miracle of some sort. He was a man; he knew as a native this masculine world into which she had only looked. Surely he could find a way out for her. She watched him with a fixed anxious eagerness.

He took his cap off and ran his finger over the thick gold-wired crest. "Ha, he's gone, has he?"

"I told you that before," Sylvia murmured. She was so tired now that she felt empty; her life was leaving her. She could hardly move.

"What did he do that for?" Russell said loudly. "Bring you over here and leave you. Ha. The man's a scoundrel. Gold-digging, eh? I've had men back from the gold-fields begging from me on the wharf at Sydney. The man's a fool. Ha!"

She did not like hearing Ling abused by this shadow of him, but she was too tired and baffled to protest. She clung to his arm in terror. If he left her, what would become of her ? She spoke humbly.

" Is there anything I could do, do you think. Could I be a stewardess ? "

He looked at her out of the corners of his eyes. " A stewardess ? I don't think so. Never did any work, did you ? It's a poor life. I'd go home if I were you, and practise my music."

" Practise my music ! " she repeated in astonishment.

" You don't know how well off you are," he said simply. " Now, if I'd had your advantages I'd be managing for Garton's now. It's no use. I read and I read, but what's the use of that ? Half the time I can't pronounce the words and the other half I've no one to pronounce them to. You can't get away from yourself in this world, can you ? "

" I should like to help you," Sylvia said gently.

His blue eyes twinkled. " Ha, would you ? " he said, amused. " Now that would be something. I'd get somewhere with you to tell me what to do."

Sylvia felt an extraordinary conviction that she had come to an end. There was nothing more for her. Her life up to this point hung suspended behind her, like an airy tunnel from which she had just emerged, to nothing, to the edge of a cliff. Her arms hung down by her sides ; she tottered. She knew, in some part of her mind, too far away for her to grasp it, that she ought to do something to save herself, turn aside, turn back, anything except abandon herself in this suspension of her being to the impulse that, rising from her own deep like one of those huge waves that lift themselves from the depths of a tranquil sea and bear down upon some unlucky ship, submerged her and thrust her forward—not blindly indeed, since she knew what she was doing, but irresistibly —to destroy herself.

" I'll marry you if you like," she said quietly. " Then I could help you to do everything you want to do."

He was startled. " Ha, all I want to do—ha," he stammered. He passed his hand over his face. " That's very kind of you."

" Well—do you want me or not ? " Sylvia said impatiently. " Please make up your mind." Her voice and manner were arrogant, as if she did not care what he said. Actually, she was still suspended in her strange calm.

He stood still and looked at her, shutting away the light that streamed across the pavement from an open door. From within came the sound of glass ringing on iron and the soft blurred speech of drunken men.

" Nay, but are you sure you want *me ?* " he asked, half sadly, half humorously. " I've nothing, you see."

" I couldn't—don't make me ask you again," Sylvia murmured.

" Well I won't then," he said, in a strange delicate voice, as if he were afraid of her. " I only wanted you to be sure. Eh, you'll be a rare wife, and I'll be good to you, you can count on that." He added anxiously : " You'll teach me how to behave myself rightly and speak and so on."

She hung back from him. " I'm tired."

" To be sure you are," he said tenderly. " Come along then, my one. I'll take you to th'door, and you must go straight upstairs to your room and not come out of it until I fetch you. Do you see, eh ? "

He lingered at the door of the hotel, reluctant to abandon the young girl to the ambiguous silence within. His tall figure straddled across the doorway.

" I shall be quite safe," Sylvia said. " I'm not nervous."

" I'll be bound you're not," he said admiringly. She felt his kindness and the smouldering warmth of his admiration and excitement. It comforted her in a way, and yet she could not face it. She noticed, too, that he had dropped his precise careful way of speaking ; he

spoke broadly and softly, like any Danesacre sailor. She held out her hand and said gently :

" Good-night. Don't be anxious about me."

" I shan't sleep on board to-night," he answered. " Good-night, my one."

What does it matter to me where he sleeps ? she thought. She stumbled up the dark staircase, touching the walls gingerly to get her bearings. She was touched by his caressing phrase. He called me " my one " twice, she said to herself : does that make two of me ? She chuckled faintly. She was ravenous with hunger, but she did not dare to pull the bell in her room or descend into the mysterious well of the house in search of food. With a faint touch of contempt, she reflected that Russell might as well have added something a little substantial to his cup of coffee. She took off her dress and lay down on the bed. As she stretched out her hand to pull the quilt over herself she fell asleep and her arm fell, stretched out towards the quilt.

Towards morning, she woke, stiff and chilled in that charnel bed. For a moment or two she lay looking at the window without remembering where she was. It was small and round, of a peculiar thick glass, and reminded her of a ship's porthole. Suddenly the memory of her afternoon on board the *Savannah* returned to her, its words and gestures mercilessly travestied by the truth, and at the same moment, as there flashed before her every detail of the *Savannah's* saloon, its light polished woodwork, plush-covered seats, and the thick yellow brass hinges of the ports, she saw that the window before her was the window of a room : the room fell into place round it, and that other room, to which for an instant she had returned, vanished away ; she lay wide awake, held fast, with cruel vividness, in the present.

The window was open at the top, and a fresh, tarry smell drifted in with the breeze from the harbour. She walked stiffly across to it and pulled aside a corner of the

blind. The sky was clear and polished, a delicate bluish-white, the colour of an empty egg-shell : light poured through it on to the house-tops. The masts of the ship she had noticed in the evening were pencilled faintly on the milky water. She saw a man leaning against the lamp-post at the other side of the street ; his cap was pulled down over his eyes and his hands pushed into his pockets. Captain Russell appeared to be asleep on his feet.

She dropped the blind and went back to bed, surprised and faintly scornful. She thought his action extravagant. To stand all night in the street ! It was the kind of exaggeration she would never have expected from him. She knew that she ought to be grateful, and she was not grateful. When she got up again, about seven o'clock, he had gone. He called for her an hour later, and she said sharply :

" Why did you wait outside last night ? There was no need. You might have got your death."

He smiled foolishly. " I don't know about that," he murmured. " It's far colder on the bridge of a ship. I've had to be standing twenty-four hours on the bridge in a gale before this."

" Well, I'm not a ship," she cried, laughing and exasperated. " You must be sensible. Now what are we going to do ? You'd better go and see the consul." She spoke in her most domineering manner, as if she were the more capable of the two.

" I'll go as soon as the office opens," he said easily.

" It takes fourteen days, you know."

" Eh, does it ? " he exclaimed. " I can arrange that. You can leave it to me. I'll talk to the consul. He's known to me for over fifteen years. Would you have said I was thirty-seven ? Well, I am."

" You'll have to be older than that to get round the law," she said, in a light voice. And within an hour he had to come back to her in her new lodgings,

crestfallen. The fourteen days could not be shortened by a minute.

"There's a new man in charge," he grumbled. "A Dutchman. He knows nothing."

"At any rate, he knows the law and he can marry us," she said cheerfully. "Come now, don't look so dejected. It's all right. You didn't tell him who I am, did you?"

He looked at her with a gleam of suspicion in his bright sunken eyes. "I gave him your name and your father's name. What could I do? He'd never heard the name Hervey before. He knows nothing, he's a Dutchman. Steal the fees, I expect."

"Can you stay as long as a fortnight?" she asked suddenly.

He wagged his head. "I'd fixed up to have voyage off," he said easily. "They're sending a man to take th'ship over. I brought her across just to oblige him. He wanted to see his wife through an illness or something —I don't know. What shall we do when th'wedding's over?" he went on in a coaxing voice. "Would you like to stay in France, my one? I've put by over a hundred pounds. We could travel somewheres—if you'd like it."

"Somewhere," she corrected him gently. "I must buy another dress if we do that."

"Must you?" he said, surprised. "Th'one you've got on looks new to me. It's pretty stuff," he added shyly, touching it with one finger. She shivered at the sound made by his roughened finger on the thick silk.

"It's my plainest frock. I left a wardrobe-full of much nicer ones in London."

"Eh, did you? A wardrobe-full!" His face darkened. "Shall you ever make do? I've only twenty pounds a month," he said roughly.

This frock cost exactly as much as that, she thought, amused. He had a great deal to learn. She felt a protective tenderness towards him. She would be able to

give him everything he had tried in vain to get for himself. His fumbling attempts at self-betterment seemed to her infinitely pathetic. Every time he hesitated over one of the long words he loved using she felt towards him like a mother watching her child learn to walk. An exquisite gentleness crept into her voice and gestures. She could not bring herself to touch him yet, but her voice reached out to him. When she put him right over a word, it was as if she caressed him. She would not allow him any doubts of himself. Fierce, eager, humble, she practised on him a tact and a solicitude so foreign to her that they might have been uncovered in her heart for the first time by the storms of the past week.

They were married by the consul in the last week of June. As soon as the short ceremony was over they left Dieppe to go to Fontainebleau. Night had fallen when they drove up to the courtyard of the small hotel. In the garden behind the courtyard lamps glimmered on the tables set out under the trees. The doorway of the hotel let out a flood of yellow light in which, for the first time since stepping out of the train, Sylvia saw her husband's face. Her courage left her. She leaned against the wall, relaxed and trembling. He was not looking at her. His eyes followed anxiously every movement of the boy struggling at the foot of the stairs with his big corded sea trunk. Sylvia watched him, too, with so much intentness that when she was an old woman she recalled the moment, the boy's convulsed face, and the grotesque shadows thrown on the white wall behind him by the lamp swinging from the beam over his head.

"Hey, boy," Russell shouted loudly. "Mind what you're doing with that box."

"It's a very heavy box," Sylvia murmured.

He turned to her. "Up the stairs with you," he said jovially. "Too late now to hang about."

As she dragged herself along behind the sweating, labouring boy, she wished the stairs would go on for ever.

One morning as they sat at breakfast in the courtyard, Russell pointed with his thumb at the window-box behind his shoulder.

" Pretty flowers, those pink genariums," he said mildly. " Ha. I've seen 'em bigger than that, though."

" They're geraniums," Sylvia said.

He gave her a look of bleak anger. " *Genariums* is what they're called by a friend of mine. He employs six gardeners. You're wrong this time. Ha. You should think before you take other people up like that."

" You asked me to put you right about things," she said coldly. It was impossible not to feel sceptical about his wealthy friend.

" There's still a few things you don't know, for all you're so sure of yourself. Yes, my girl." He stroked his moustache with an air of satisfaction that filled Sylvia with a pure feeling of dislike. She said nothing more, but from that time she took less trouble with him, and when next she corrected him her voice had a sharpened edge. She had a clear strong voice, which became repellent when she used it to make angry and sarcastic speeches.

She was not in love with him. But she surrendered herself to him at first with an eager grace. His heavy indolent tenderness restored her self-respect. She could not overcome her instinctive shrinking from him, but she did not oppose him. He could have of her what he wanted, and the more he asked of her the better, in these days, she was pleased. There was something childlike in the way he came to her. " Eh, are you tired of me, then ? " he said, in a soft grumbling voice. " You're a beauty, y'are. Laughing at me, are you ? B-r-r-r-r." She forced herself to submit gracefully.

Her kindness to him had a gentle touch of patronage. She was unaware of it. So, for the most part, was he. Yet there were times when her voice rapped him so sharply

over the knuckles that he glowered at her like a sulky boy. At these times he disliked her intensely. But he was proud of her and dazzled by her. Her fine delicate beauty roused in him a sensation of fear and tenderness, unlike anything he had ever felt for a woman. He could not assimilate her. She was like certain books over which he had pored, hour after long hour, his mind almost blank, struggling to grasp a sense and a beauty that the cloud of words persistently hid from him.

She delighted in the gay little hotel and the French food and wines. He disliked them because they were un-English, and was glad when their fortnight came to an end. He was looking forward, with a faint complacence, to his return with his wife. Once he asked her whether she had written to her mother. "Of course," she answered, with a glance at him that stopped any more questions. He nursed an inarticulate resentment against her because of the ease with which she could, as he said, put him down. Once he tried on her the hectoring voice he kept for the officers and apprentices of the *Savannah*, but she turned on him with so much bitterness and contempt that his spirit died in him and he had to go away from her.

She had no answer to her letter. She longed for her mother, but she had made up her mind already to have no reproaches. If Mary welcomed her as a loved and loving daughter she would be just that, and do her best, by holding up her head, to wear down scandal. Tears and humility were not in the bond. She had thrust out of sight all memory of Ling and with it the memory of her agonised self-abasement in the bedroom at the *Hôtel de l'Europe*. Not even to herself would Sylvia Russell confess that she had behaved foolishly. A cold self-righteousness began to grow over the memory of her humiliation. Henceforth, she would always be in the right. Other persons might injure her, might mislead her—but she was infallible. Her will could do no wrong.

They reached Middlesbrough in the middle of a hot July afternoon. Leaving Russell to wait for her at the *George*, she took a cab and drove to the Garton office. On the way she noticed that the streets were full of men. With an air of sullen indifference they drifted up and down the road, hulking great brutes of men, dockers and iron-workers. It was like an invasion of the town. The shopkeepers peered at them round their doors with an air of fascinated distrust : several had put up their shutters. At one corner she saw a fat sweating greengrocer being baited by two dockers. One was offering him twopence for a large pineapple, while the other poked him in the ribs and roared with laughter at his anguished jerks. When the cab stopped at the office she asked the man what had happened.

" Lock-out an' strike," he told her. " Garton's yards closed down last week when th'men wouldn't ha' their wages shortened. Then th'men in th'other yards struck. Now th'dockers is all out. Eh, it's a do."

The clerk who came forward to speak to her told her that Mrs. Hervey was shut up in conference with the men's leaders. He looked at her with sly curiosity. The wildest stories about her were being handed round the office : the latest and best-documented was that she had married the master of one of Garton's boats and persuaded him to abandon his ship and come home. He peered at her gloved left hand.

" My mother will want to see me," Sylvia said coldly.

" Well," the clerk drawled. " I don't know so much. Mrs. Hervey said no one was to disturb her."

" Will you have the goodness to tell my mother I am here ? " Her manner intimidated him. He went away. A few minutes later he came back and said : " Mrs. Hervey will see you in one moment." Sylvia smiled. She had triumphed so far.

Mary was facing three very angry men. Each of them was as bitter against her as if she had done him some

frightful personal wrong. Her old friend Forbes was more bitter against her than any. He looked at her with a hurt baffled fury, as if he could not understand her. And yet she was only behaving as she had always warned him she would behave. If the men opposed her she would fight them. She disliked the shipwrights' union and its officials, she did her best to ignore it, she had agreed to meet him and the other two only because Richard had begged her to do it. In her heart of hearts, she was determined not to make any concessions through the representatives of a union.

She had allowed Richard to issue a long statement, explaining the position to the men—things were bad, and though there were faint signs of a trade recovery, the strain had been terrific and was not over. She had been against offering any explanation at all—and see what had come of it! Refusal, lock-out, strike: a policeman killed in a scuffle at the yard gates and four men injured: and her friend Forbes treating her as if she were a murderess.

Wearily she went over the ground with them again, and they listened with a deliberate lack of comprehension. They had reiterated all their figures and arguments until there could be nothing more to say. Yet they sat on, uneasy and resentful, as if hoping by mere dumb pressure of their wills on hers to force Mary to give way.

"What do you want me to do, gentlemen? Ruin the firm to meet the men's demands? You'd be a deal better off then, wouldn't you? Perhaps you'd like to run it yourselves and pay every man five hundred a year? Well, pay me my price and I'll sell out to you."

They hated her for her manner and her heavy sarcasm. They felt their manhood insulted, not so much by her jeering feminine voice, as by some quality in her that, neither masculine nor womanly, but inimical to them, confronted them in shameless, naked hostility.

"The men have no money to buy your firm off you,"

Forbes said contemptuously. "You and the rest take care of that. Don't talk nonsense, woman."

"Could you run it if I gave it to you?" she jeered.

"Try us and see," one man said laconically.

She turned on him quickly. "You know you couldn't. You could no more do it than I could rivet plates. Running this firm is my job and I do it. I've done it so well that Garton's is the only firm on the Tees that hasn't laid off half its men. I've kept it going for you."

"And for yourself," Forbes exclaimed.

"Am I not to be paid, then?" she cried. "Am I to work ten hours a day for the satisfaction of putting bread into your stomachs? Why should I work only for that?"

"There's very little bread or aught else gone into th'men's stomachs this year," he said. "But I daresay you've managed to pick a bit on most days."

"I didn't arrange the world," Mary said drily. "I'd be as well pleased as the rest of you if shipping firms ran themselves and paid every man jack of you handsome profits. Until that happens I shall go on running mine to the best of my wits and pay what wages the firm will stand. . . . You and your *equality!* God bless my soul, you'll be coming to me next to complain that the big riveting machine is more important than the others and ought to be cut down to make little ones."

"Eh, but it's what's happened to us," Forbes stammered. "There was a time when the shipwright was all. Now he's been cut down into a dozen little men each doing one miserable job, and you do what you like with us."

She looked at them and they at her. Between them on the table lay sheets of paper covered with figures. No one looked at them; she knew them by heart, and the men did not believe in them. They believed nothing she told them of the firm's financial state. They believed only that they were being tricked and robbed. The contrast between her state and theirs, her house and the

row on row of sordid scaling houses behind the yards and the mills, between her and their wives, had bitten deep into them. They were sore with it. Behind each one of them was a thought, of privation and hard times, a memory sucked in with their mothers' milk, a dark bitter heritage : the mothers' hearts had broken to the sweet melancholy air of a song that young Mary Roxby had heard without hearing it, in Mark Henry's shipyard :

> " O hard times, come again no more . . .
> Many times have ye lingered
> Around my cottage door ;
> O hard times, come again no more."

the sons' hearts did not break ; they were toughened ; the melancholy was turned in them to a living rage. Yet the song was part of their memory. Behind Mary was an idea—the idea of Garton's, which had become almost the idea of England to her—for which she would fight them with every weapon she had.

Between them ran a black brackish stream of mistrust and resentment. It carried away their words. Neither really heard the other. They gave her no credit for the gallons of milk and hundreds of loaves she was giving away every day to the strikers' wives and children—they resented her charity even though they took it—and she did not thank them for their efforts to prevent sabotage and violence at the Yard.

" Call yourself a Christian ! " Forbes said suddenly. " And let th'childer go hungry half the year and begging their mammies for a bit of summat to keep them going. A Christian ! "

The other two men stirred uneasily, recalling his reputation as a blasphemer. They had no desire to mix themselves up with him in that.

" Christ said that all men are equal in spirit," Mary said. " He didn't say that I had to destroy myself—and Garton's —to make them equal in goods as well."

" The cunning of it ! " he exclaimed. " Even your

religion has to toe the line. There's nowhere an honest man can have you."

A clerk, coming in nervously, whispered in her ear. She gave him a sharp glance and said steadily : " Tell her one minute, please."

When the man had gone she sat for a moment fingering the papers spread about the table, while they watched her, weary of repeating themselves and of her answers. She pushed the papers aside and said civilly :

" I'm sorry to ask you to step out for a short time, gentlemen. You can have the Board room to talk in, if you like. Please make use of it. I must attend to some urgent business. Will you allow me ? "

They got up and went out, their faces baffled and alert. As they filed past Sylvia she heard Forbes say with a laugh : " You might as well talk to my ——. It'll tell you fewer lies."

Mary looked up as the girl came into the room. She could hardly believe that Sylvia was unchanged. There should be some mark on her, some shadow of her folly and wickedness. But the girl who had come back was the girl who went away. She hung a moment in the doorway, her slender body stooping forward, her eyes sparkling ; a smile, half doubting, half eager, played over her face. Just so and in no other form had she lingered in the doorway of Mary's room the evening before she left for London, seeming reluctant either to stay or go, like a child that wants to be off and lingers, doubtful and loving. Mary stood up and smiled.

Sylvia clung to her mother with little cries of pleasure. She was taller than Mary by four inches but she contrived to make herself seem small and defenceless, a little girl taking refuge with her mother. Mary felt herself trembling with rage and anguish, rage against the injury her child had worked herself and anguish for the injured child. She could never forgive Sylvia for what she had done to herself and she could never make it up to her.

"Oh, my darling, my baby," she repeated. "Why did you do it?"

The girl drew herself away with a quick decisive movement.

"Do what, mother?"

"All of it," Mary said, in agony. "You should have come back, or sent for me, when Rupert left you. You must have known I would understand, and help you. You needn't have married anyone else."

"There was nothing to understand," Sylvia said coldly She disliked intensely this show of emotion. "As for marrying—I had to marry some time, hadn't I?"

"You could have married *anyone*," Mary said. The thought of the brilliant match her younger daughter was to have made stung her into irony. "You needn't have gone so far for such a husband."

"The fact remains that I have married William Russell," Sylvia said calmly. "Whether he is anyone or someone doesn't matter—he is my husband. Look at my ring."

Mary took no notice of her. She sat down and said cheerfully: "I'd rather look at you. Let me see you."

The girl was changed, after all. She had a new assurance, the subtlest blunting of her fineness, a faint air of use. Yet she was still pitifully childish. Mary would not see the changes. She drove her knowledge of them into her heart and shut herself away from it.

"We must think what is the best thing to do," she said. "Would you like to live at Danesacre? I believe we could get you one of the smaller houses in St. Mary's Terrace, above our old house. I've been making enquiries. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"Why Danesacre?" the girl said brusquely. "I prefer here."

"You couldn't live here—yet," Mary said unguardedly.

Sylvia's eyes gleamed. "Why not? I'm not ashamed of myself."

"I daresay you're not. But you'll find yourself happier at Danesacre," her mother said smoothly. She could not face for the girl the snubs and glances Sylvia would have to endure if she remained in the narrow purse-proud circle of Tees-side ironmasters and shipowners and their wives. Danesacre would be kinder to her. "I can drive over and see you two or three times every week," she said, with a strange air of pleading and wistfulness.

Sylvia ignored the latter remark. "I don't wish to bury myself in Danesacre," she said coldly. "I've made up my mind what I want to do. If I can't have it, I don't want anything else."

Mary felt a new exquisite pity for her. She was so young and hard and ungracious. "If you'd believe I want to help you," she murmured.

"You can help me if you choose to. I want to have a house here, where I can go to the dances and parties and give parties myself. And I want you to take William into the firm. He can be a manager or something. He knows a great deal already and he can soon learn the rest." She leaned forward and said pleadingly, with the quick assurance of a spoilt child: "You will, won't you, mother?"

A look of displeasure came over Mary's face. "I can't do that," she said at once.

"Why not? Why can't you?"

"Listen to me, Sylvie," Mary said patiently. "I can't put an untrained man in charge of any part of Garton's. Your marrying him doesn't make him anything but what he is—the master of a ship, entirely ignorant of office management and the affairs of a large firm. I couldn't work him even into the Line office. You must be reasonable. I'll make you a proper allowance and buy you a house at Danesacre—here, if you insist—and with time you'll make something of your life. You'll have children, and they'll make up to you for missing other things. I'll help you all I can."

"Make up to me?" Sylvia echoed. "Nothing will ever make up to me for your cruelty," she said loudly. "You're punishing me for running away. You've chosen this mean underhand way of punishing me. *You* help me! Why, you won't do the only thing I ask you to do. Money's no use to me if I can't have something for William, too. I must have it. You must do it for me."

She was beside herself with anger at the thought of being crossed in her desire to do something for her husband. She wanted to benefit him, to have the satisfaction of saying to herself that she had "made" him. Her mother's opposition roused in her a fury of indignation—as if she herself were being insulted and injured. She had ceased to plead. She condescended to it only when she was sure of getting what she wanted. Her pride would not let her plead when it might be useful.

"Why won't you do it, then?"

A feeling of hostility sprang up in Mary. It flickered in her eyes. She was roused against her daughter now, stung to defend herself by the girl's insolence of voice and manner.

"He's not the type of man I'd have in my firm in any circumstances," she said contemptuously. "He's not reliable. Why should you expect me to reward a master for deserting his ship in a French port, as Captain Russell did? I suppose he thought you would be able to make it right for him with us."

Sylvia looked at her with dislike. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that the Line had a telegram from Dieppe to say that Captain Russell intended to leave his ship there. She was due to sail, mind you, and she was delayed three days while we sent another man to take her over. Is that the sort of man you're asking me to promote to a responsible position?"

Sylvia felt herself growing numb. Her thoughts

melted into confusion. That glib tale of his about the other captain's wife—it had seemed to run off his tongue, and there was not a word of truth in it.

She stammered. "I thought he was taking a voyage off."

"Not until he announced it from Dieppe," Mary retorted. "But all his voyages are voyages off in future, so far as Garton's is concerned. *I* shall never give him another boat."

Sylvia sat white and silent.

Her mother was sorry for her again, and sorry for her own bitterness. "It wouldn't have done to take him into the firm as a manager," she said gently. "We've had a brother of his in the drawing office for years. Neither of them would feel very comfortable."

He had told her that the only relative he had left, when his mother died, was a sister, who had been dead for several years.

"So you're not even going to give him another ship?" she said coldly.

"Certainly not."

Her disillusion turned her against her mother. Just as when she was a child she had turned on the nearest person to vent her rage over some accident or disappointment, it might be a toy she had dropped and broken, or a spoiled frock, so she turned on her mother now. She must punish someone for her mistakes.

"Then you'll do nothing for us," she cried. "I don't want your allowance, I don't want anything from you. I hate you. If I have any children I shall teach them to hate you, too. I'll never come near you again."

Her cheeks flamed and her thin shoulders quivered with rage. She ran out of the room.

Mary sat for a long time in helpless bewilderment. How had she so mishandled the savage young creature? She had not meant to drive her away. She was filled with love and grief for her. She thought that the girl must be

suffering, and that was unbearable, since she did not believe that anyone except herself—least of all one of her children—was strong enough to endure suffering.

Only in one thing she remained unshaken—she would not take William Russell into Garton's. It was unthinkable. Surely when Sylvia quietened down, she would see that it was impossible. The girl was sensible enough when she was not angry.

A few days later she heard from Mrs. James that Sylvia had taken a small house in Danesacre, the end house of a street looking over the railway and the harbour to the east side. She wrote to her, a long careful letter, and sent her the clothes she had brought back with her from Louise's house. Clothes and letter both came back, with a short note in Sylvia's nervous masculine writing. "Mrs. Russell does not wish Mrs. Hervey to give her anything at all."

It was absurd, childish—and terrible. Mary was at a loss. She looked from the letter to the boxes of clothes and did not know what to do. But these were Sylvia Hervey's clothes, she thought sadly; not Mrs. Russell's. She took the dresses out and laid them on the couch. The fine glistening silk of the last one billowed as she laid it down, and collapsed softly, with a faint airy sound like the delicate breathing of a living creature. She would not order them to be put away. It was as if they had retained some part of the young girl's mysterious life, as if she had lived herself into them. Mary had the feeling that she would be shutting her child away from her with her clothes. "Leave them alone," she said, and there they remained, lying about her room, for two days.

Richard came in when she was looking at them. She was so forlorn, sitting bunched up beside the pile of dresses like a tired bird, that he did not know how to comfort her.

"Better put them away, or give them to Clarry," he said.

"Oh, I couldn't give them away," she said decisively.

"Well, don't worry. She'll come round. She was like this as a child. Don't you remember her, the way she raged and stormed?—and when it was all over she behaved like an angel, a young angel."

"Yes," his mother said.

She picked up one of the dresses and laid it down again. She moved him almost beyond himself. He went over to her and stroked her hand. When he was close to her he could see the fine lines of age and weariness below her eyes.

"Don't get old," he said, in a coaxing voice. "I can't bear it. You promised me to live for ever. You know you did. Had you forgotten?"

"Well, I shan't, thank heaven," she said, laughing at him. "Who would live for ever in a world like this?"

"Is there another?"

"Of course there is," she said defiantly. "You don't suppose we just *end?* I don't mean to, if you do, my son."

He could not believe that she would, as she said, end. There was about her an air of stolidity and quiet defiance—a tacit rebuke to the insolence of fate. She was the heart and centre of the magnificence she had created round herself—this house, Garton's, the whole of her rich, splendid achievement. Without her it would not exist, or exist altered, shaken, given over to change. She would not change. She was still all that he remembered of her as a boy; her clear, penetrating common sense had not failed, nor had her will, that fierce tenacious grasp of hers on everything that belonged to her. What she had set herself, as a young girl, to do she had done, and remained unaltered, her pride and her gentleness both unquenched.

"You don't think I drove Sylvia away, do you?" she asked anxiously.

"Of course you didn't." In his heart he thought that probably she had. Her stubbornness had always provoked Sylvia to rebellion, and there was about her, even when she was most roused, an almost scornful gentleness that the girl

could not stand. She wanted her mother to lose her temper and bully her, but that Mary would never do. The girl could not understand it. It made her feel an inferior ; she imagined that her mother did not respect her.

" You did everything you could," he repeated.

Mary sighed. " I failed," she said. She looked at him with bright eyes. " Nothing much worse can happen," she said softly, " unless you were to die."

The nerves of his chest contracted sharply. " I shan't do that. I might go away."

" Go away ? " she echoed vaguely. " Well, why shouldn't you go away ? You've been working hard enough. Where would you like to go ? "

" We'll talk about it later," he said gently.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

HOW much we might be spared if we could realise that the image of ourselves which we try to impress on other people is the only one they can never, in any circumstances, receive. It did not occur to Cynthia Roxby that what she meant Richard to see in her and what he actually saw might be quite different. In the same way, she failed completely to understand him when, from the moment she became his mistress, his whole manner to her changed. He ceased to be what she called unmanageable and unreasonable ; his gentleness revealed to her a new Richard, anxious to please her, to flatter her self-pride, an uncritical worshipper with whom for the first time she felt comfortable and at her ease. She supposed that he had changed to her because he was afraid of losing her, and because he had realised that he would never now be able to do without her : she smiled, and began to treat him with an air of indifference, absurd and rather pitiful.

She could not have made a profounder mistake, nor—since she loved him—one with a sadder consequence for herself. Yet how was she to know that his kindness, the half-anguished gentleness with which he treated her sprang from his new certainty that he could in fact do without her ? His passion was the only part of him which was detachable, the one impulse he could disregard. He could not tell her this, but he tried to save her from being hurt by it—like a mother who all its life has kept from her child the knowledge that she is deformed and will not allow her to go near a mirror or to do anything that might show her to herself as she actually is. If Cynthia would only let herself be saved ! He surrounded her with every kind of loving attention. With a sharp grief he saw that

he had succeeded only in persuading her that she could behave as she liked.

She was going off to join her aunt in Scotland. The night before she left, Richard asked her in front of his mother how soon she would be ready to marry him. "I shan't marry for years," she said gaily. "Marriage is the end of everything for a woman." She was leaning against an open window : with a little laugh she stepped over the low sill on to the terrace and stood for a moment, one thin arm stretched out in the light from the window ; the next she had disappeared into the darkness of the garden. With a glance at his mother, Richard sprang after her. He caught her up at the top of the first flight of steps that descend from terrace to terrace down the side of the hill. She started away from him, caught her foot in her dress and would have rolled down the whole flight if he had not snatched at her.

He was angry. "Silly girl," he said furiously. "You might have broken your neck."

"My nice thin neck," she said lightly, stretching it out like a peacock.

The darkness, which has as many gradations of intensity and colour as the day, was here opaque, like deep water, in which the trees and plants waved slowly as if stirred by the current ; the girl's white frock was like a shaft of sunlight, subdued, in the depths to which it had penetrated, to a milky blur. At the other side of the valley the bed of this strange ocean climbed slowly, and waves of greeny darkness lapped the base of the sky.

Richard held her gently, smoothing the bright hair from her face. "Don't let's wait too long," he said. "I hate you to go away without me. I'm afraid something might happen to you and I shouldn't be there to look after you."

Cynthia laughed at him. "There you see," she cried. "When I'm married, I shall never be free again."

"Do you want to be free ? "

"Don't you ? "

"No," Richard said. "I want you to be so sure of me that I need never think of another woman as long as I live."

She did not understand him. "Is that your idea of marriage?" she cried, in a light unkind voice. "Don't you really want to be free?"

"Why do you ask so many questions?" Richard said lovingly. "You know that most of them have no answers. Can't you just take me?—forgive me, but I can't spend my life running after you, Cynthy. Where you are, I must be *at home*."

"Mrs. Richard Roxby—at home to her husband Fridays and Tuesdays." She was convinced, in another of those glib phrases of hers, that she owed it to her self-respect to keep him "uncertain." Her ideas of marriage, without being either generous or brave, were very romantic.

"Well—will you marry me in September, when you come back from Scotland?"

"Will you agree to live in London?"

Richard did not answer her except to draw her closer to himself, so that she was lying in his arms on the grassy edge of the terrace. He did not know how to make it clear to her that if he refused, it was not because he wanted her any less. "I should be worth nothing to you in London," he said at last. "This is where I fit in. If I were cut off from Garton's I shouldn't exist. Can't you see? All that's quite apart from the fact that my mother, if I went, would feel that I had behaved badly. And I should have behaved badly—abominably. You're asking me for the one thing I can't do. It's impossible." He repeated slowly: "It's—quite—impossible."

"But you love me, don't you?" She laid her long, bare arms round his neck and dragged his head down to hers. "Is that what you want?" he asked gently. As he gave himself up to her he reflected that he was not likely to have her again: he wanted her to feel sure of him, to take with her, since they were the last, so clear

and lively a memory of his kisses that she could never afterwards be humiliated by the thought that he had not, as she would say, " really " loved her. To have finished with her was an anguish much sharper than the pleasure she gave him. " I'm yours," he whispered, " everything is for you. You know that, don't you ?—good-bye, oh, good-bye." " It's settled that we're to live in London, then ? " Cynthia said drowsily. He could not help smiling. " No. Never."

She did not believe him. How could she—when everything he did gave the lie to everything he said. As they walked back to the house, along the darkened front of which a light, carried from room to room by a servant who was fastening the windows, flashed a mysterious message to the darkness, she dragged at his arm. " What an immense sky," she said childishly : " it's because there are no gas lamps."

He saw her alone for a moment in the morning, when she was waiting for the carriage. " I'm not asking you to spend the whole of your life in Roxby House," he said. " I only want you to let it be your home."

" But I've made up my mind," she cried lightly.

He stood back to see her better, anxious to remember her as he saw her now, poised in the wide doorway, as if caught and fastened there on the edge of flight, her bright hair showing above the collar of her cape. He wanted to be sure that never a day like this, with such a sky and such a flickering of light and shadow as this, would come again without reminding him of her. " You're very lovely," he said, and impressed by the extraordinary futility of speech, added : " I'm sorry you're going away."

She kissed him lightly. " You'll follow me before very long, my dear. Smile at me before I go." He remembered what it was he had been wanting to say to her : " *For though thou hast the heart to say farewell, I have not power to stay thee*," he said quickly. " Don't go, Cynthy."

She moved away from the doorway, and as if for the first time he noticed that outside the morning was grey and quiet, promising one of those days on which, lacking the sun, trees, fields and flowers wear their summer richness with an air of unreality. He recalled just such another morning when he had waited in the hall of Mark Henry's house for his mother to come downstairs and say good-bye to him : he was going off to school, and he hoped until the last possible moment that her first words when she came would be : " I've decided not to send you away after all " : he had even prepared his reply to this remark, which was never made. He had known that it would never be made, just as he knew now that the speech he had prepared for a kind submissive Cynthia would not be needed. But the failure of his hopes was no less an agony. When she moved away from him, with a smile and a wave of her gloved hand, he leaned against the railing of the gallery for support. It supported him just where he needed it, in the region of his stomach, which had apparently detached itself from the rest of his organs and was floating painfully up and down in his body, showing, he considered, a certain lack of proportion, since it had behaved in precisely the same way on his first evening at school and in the moment before the start of a point-to-point steeplechase in which he rode for Oxford against Cambridge. Now that he was actually suffering horribly, it should have the decency not to force itself on his notice in this childish way. Nicholas Roxby appeared at his elbow. " We're off," he said pleasantly. Richard held out his hand. " Good luck. I'm glad you and Clarry are going to be married quickly." " So am I," the boy said, with a laugh. He seemed to think better of what he had been about to say next, and, slipping his arm in Richard's, walked with him to the door.

Cynthia was already in the carriage. For a moment, when Richard spoke to her, she looked at him with an air of doubt. It vanished at once, and his last sight of

her was of a laughing, confident face. She called out something he did not hear. He contented himself with smiling at her until the carriage was too far away for her to see him clearly. She should go off happy.

He wrote to her, in a way that he hoped would convince her, explaining that he had never meant to give up Garton's or to live in London. He said nothing about Roxby House, as to which his mind was made up. He could no more give up the house in which not only the furniture and the pictures but the stones themselves had become by the alchemy of time the men and women who had lived among them, than he could drive out of himself his memory of them, his in a deeper sense than were the memories of his own short life. Cynthia's reply, between descriptions of the admiration she had excited among the men of her aunt's house party, was as unmistakable in its warning. "You must be sensible, my dear. Come to town when we get back and we'll talk it over, and look for a suitable house—you can't imagine that Roxby House is suitable for a beautiful and be-praised young woman. You might be able to sell it to one of your red-faced Yorkshire ship-owners. Why not? I daresay he'd think it wonderful, and his wife could give parties to the local gentry. Heavens!"

After that he gave her up. He knew that his mother would ask him no questions, and he told her part of the truth. He watched her closely to see whether he could detect any signs of relief, but she looked at him and said timidly: "Do you mind very much, my son?"

"Horribly," he said lightly. She tried to think of a way out for him, but could see none, unless he gave up Garton's. And that seemed to her as impossible as it had seemed to him. But a change was taking place in him, as extraordinary and as natural as one of those tropical storms that change in a few hours the face of a whole countryside. He realised now that if he had let Cynthia go because of Garton's, it was because Garton's was his

mother—it was for her sake that he had made the sacrifice. At the same moment he saw her with a brief clearness, almost as if he were a stranger in whom the sight of her woke none of those memories through which, until now, he had been compelled to look at her. Stripped of them, he saw for a moment an arrogant little woman, narrow-minded and incredibly stubborn, to whom no new idea would ever appeal ; her courage and her generosity sprang from the same root, a possessive instinct so fierce that just as she would never let anything of her own go so she would never deny anything to what was her own. The sight of her like this gave him the same feeling of anguish as on the day he had lost her in a crowded street, a long time ago, when he was still a child, and had stood, paralysed by fear, rooted in the place where he had seen her last, until he caught sight of her again, looking anxiously round her for her little boy. But now no exquisite moment of relief followed his anguish. He crossed the room quickly and knelt beside her chair, pressing his forehead against her knee. Her hands, laid gently on each side of his face, gave him the courage to look up. She was what she always had been for him—he saw in her unchanged all the goodness, the simplicity, the wise tenderness on which without thinking of her he had relied, and which had never failed him. The change was in himself.

" Oughtn't you to go and see her, and talk to her ? " she asked, trying to comfort him.

He smiled at her lovingly. " It 'ud be no earthly use, my dear. She's made up her mind, you know. She never felt that I was a particularly good match—and when you add to that the disadvantages of living up here—there's nothing much left, is there ? "

" The girl's a fool," Mary said angrily. " Or mad." She could not conceive that any sane young woman would refuse her son.

" Don't worry about it," he said quickly. " I think more of you than of any young woman."

CHAPTER TWELVE

MARY was on her way to see Forbes, who had been in bed for a fortnight, with a variety of complaints none of which could be treated properly because what cured one aggravated the others. His niece was lying in wait for her outside the house. "Don't tell my uncle t'strike's over," she said urgently. "He'll be put past himself with it."

Forbes was lying in the upstairs room, as swollen as a drowned man. He greeted her eagerly. "The strike's off, isn't it? Th'fool thought because I couldn't see 'em I couldn't hear 'em dragging along past th'window on their way to th'yards. You've done us again. Eh, damn 'em, I knew they'd give in when I dropped out. They've none of them the spirit I had when I was their age." It sounded like bragging, but in a man as near gone as he was, what is bragging?

"Arbitration," Mary said, pronouncing one of those words which among civilised persons is invested for a time with all the dangerous magic that savages get rid of by pouring it into their totem poles. It was just coming into favour when she uttered it, later to be a little elbowed aside in favour of another, at once more ambiguous and more flattering: co-operation.

Forbes grinned. "Oh, you'll arbitrate," he said, "you'll arbitrate famished stomachs into full ones and lies into th'truth. Have you come here without any soup? Where's your manners, woman? You s'd always bring soup when you visit the suffering poor."

Mary glanced round his room. "If you were as poor as that you'd sell me the cupboard I've been trying these five years to buy from you."

"I've left it you in my will," he said jeeringly. "You've not long to wait."

Mary's face altered. "You'll live to plague me," she said gently. "Don't think you won't. I've sent for a Newcastle man to look at you."

His mouth twitched. "Still doing good?"

"How you dislike me now," she exclaimed.

He smiled at her cheerfully. "I ought to dislike you," he said mildly. "The fact that I don't shows what a poor muddled fool I am. You'd better go now. Tell that girl down there not to come bothering me. I've little enough time to think without having to think of answers to her daft questions. What do you suppose happens to a man's thoughts when he dies? One minute I'm looking at that crack on the ceiling, and thinking, and the next—where's it gone? You can't bury a thought, can you? Take a look at your cupboard when you get downstairs; I've had it moved away from th'stove."

She walked back to the office through the crowd of dockers coming off work. They shuffled past her in their stained clothes, their faces streaked with sweat and the dirt they rubbed into it with the backs of their hands: one of them, as she passed, was trying to explain that he had just not been killed by the sudden descent of a crane; his air of surprise and resentment was comical. They made no attempt to get out of her way, and every now and then she had to step into the gutter to avoid a straggling group. When she reached her room she opened the window and stood looking at the river. It was crowded with Tyne colliers, grim little boats with bows as round as a man's fist. They were loading coal, and a cloud of fine black dust hung round them in the windless air.

She turned round as the door of her room opened—it was Hugh, with a handful of papers. He laid them on her desk and flung himself into a chair. She asked him, surprised to see him sit there with closed eyes, if he were ready to go home. He nodded without speaking. It was with him one of those moments of fatigue or abstraction when the skull appears plainly under the bright

flesh. His eyelids looked sunken and his face colourless. He opened his eyes to say quickly : " Do you realise that you haven't had a holiday since we left Danesacre, six years ago—nor, except for Newmarket and Goodwood, have I."

" Where would you like to go, Hughie ? "

He sat up. " My idea was a small French town," he said, " with a paved square and a band under the trees at night."

" We'll go, then," she said, coming close to him. He smiled gratefully. " Bless you, you're always ready to do what I want. Isn't there anywhere you'd rather go." She shook her head, trembling. " I don't care where I go," she said in a low voice, " if it's with you."

" You'd never go away at all unless I took you, would you ? "

" No. I hate moving about," she said simply. " I prefer my own house to anyone else's."

" Then we'll stay at home," he said, disappointed.

" Oh no, we won't. We'll start next week. Where is your paved square and your band ? "

Richard came in as he was telling her and sat on the edge of her desk, swinging his legs, and listening. She turned to him and said : " You wanted to go away, Richie. Will you go when we come back or have you made your plans ? "

" When you come back will do," he answered. Some quality in his voice startled her, and she stood staring at him. " I want to be away for a long time—three or four years at least."

She was dumb and stood shaking. " You'll never come back," she said at last, going straight behind what he said to what was in his mind, unknown even to himself—much as a man may be unaware of the changes that, taking place in his face as he speaks, give him away to all and sundry.

"Well, I don't know," he said, puzzled. "Why shouldn't I come back?"

"You won't," she repeated. "You've made up your mind. Why did you let that girl go if you meant to leave me anyway?"

"But I didn't," he answered, half angry with her for being hurt, and very sorry for her. "You mustn't get that into your head, my dear. I've come to an end of things here. I must get away, and make something of myself."

"Make something?" Mary echoed. "Isn't Garton's enough for you?"

He smiled at her very sweetly. "Garton's isn't mine," he said gently. "*I* didn't make it. It's all yours. Don't think I want to take it from you," he added quickly. "You made it, and you're equal to it. I'm not. It isn't in my bones. If you were to say—Here, take it—I should run for my life."

"When did you find all this out?" Hugh said drily. He was angry with Richard and yet he understood him. In a way, he was on Richard's side, and against her, against her obstinate tenacious will, which used everyone for its own ends. At the same time, he was angry because Richard was disappointing her. When he looked at her she seemed in the last few moments to have lost dignity; her hands slipped in and out of one another in a foolish gesture which made him want to hide them from her eyes.

"About the time I was being jilted, I think, sir," Richard said pleasantly, "but I daresay I should have found it out later." He turned to his mother with a laugh, half boyish and half hurt. "I must go, my dear. You must let me."

Mary put her hand up to cover her mouth, trying instinctively to conceal from him that it was trembling. When he was a small boy she had had to pretend, before he would go off to a party without her, that she was anxious to be left alone; now she tried to cover up her real anguish,

so that he should not be made to feel wretched and guilty. "I can manage perfectly well without you for a few years," she said quickly. "In fact—just now it will be easier. You must stay as long as you like." She stopped. The futility of what she was saying made her angry. "Don't talk nonsense to me about Garton's," she exclaimed. "It's for you, whether you want it or not. I began it for myself, but I meant you to have it in the end." She looked from her son to her husband, and the pity in their faces struck her. She started away from them.

"Where are you going?" she said quickly.

"I thought of New Orleans—for a start."

"New Orleans," Mary repeated.

"I saw a picture of it last week," Richard said vaguely. "It attracted me."

Mary was shocked. To set off for a town at the other side of the world because one has seen a picture of it! She heard herself exclaim: "All the Roxbys are mad!" —a remark for which she never forgave herself, unable to understand that it had been wrenched out of her in the confusion of her mind, like a life prisoner who seizes the chance of a revolution in his gaol to make his escape into the light. Yet as soon as she had said it, she actually saw, in her son's long narrow face, a reminiscence of Archie Roxby, a shadowed expression, the passage behind his eyes of some ancestral memory, stubborn, repellent, strange. It slipped past, and she cried: "Oh, my baby. There, never mind, of course you must go. You've had so few changes."

Richard said nothing. Nothing, indeed, remained to be said. His mind was closed against her, but a sense of pity and a dull anguish crept about among the roots of his being. He put his head down, his long dark Roxby head, and went away. His horse was stabled at the *George*, and when he went for it, a woman came out of the house door with a little muff belonging to Sylvia. He promised to send it to her. My poor dear, he thought

ironically, none of your children are kind to you except Clarry. He sat for a moment in the sunny little yard, watching two pigeons walk up and down like old cronies in a garden, then stuffed the muff in his pocket and rode out, under the low arch, to the busy street.

The day turned cold, and Mary had a fire lit in her bedroom. She sat at the window, watching the last of the light withdrawn from the sky : it had long since left the earth, from which, released by the cooling of the air, a fine bitter smell of soil and grass was rising, an unseen vaporous current, like one of those that flow, faintly discoloured and separate, through a clear stream, unseen in the sunshine and appearing as soon as the dying light, striking obliquely through the water, irradiates and reveals it. She loved the *daylight*. Every day now she saw it go with more reluctance, drawing away with it, a resistless torrent, the trees, the swinging branches of the elms, the bush of peonies beside the lawn, the sharpened hollows of the hills, all the forms and colours that for her were the significance of life. She was revolted by the thought of dying, since, believer as she was, the exchanging of spiritual for physical body seemed to her a bad bargain. She could not accept, without bitterness, the reminder that, after she was gone, the grass would still lean over to the wind, leaves would unfold, buds open, daisies grow tall in summer, rain fall from the darkened heavens, birds sing before sunrise, seas lie sleek in the sun, music sound, and she not hear or see them.

She thought of her ships, of the old yard at Danesacre, of Hugh as a young man, of Mark Henry Garton, laughing like a clown and slapping his thighs, of a little boy in short starched petticoats on the lawn of Roxby House, of Archie dying unnoticed, of a crimson silk dress of Charlotte Hansyke's, of the shadows falling across the ceiling of her bedroom at Hansyke Manor, like a delicate lichen or the subtle colouring of an artist on an old canvas. These were the things she had taken for herself from time ; yet

time in the end would have them off her and she and they go down in darkness together. What had Forbes said? you can't bury a thought, can you? He was wrong—there is no metaphysic of the grave.

She drew the curtain over the window. At once the room, as if in response to the attention she now paid it, became friendly. It was a replica of her room in the St. Mary's Terrace house, and of an earlier room still, the bedroom in Mark Henry's house in which she had slept after her second marriage, so that wherever she looked she saw only familiar things, Mark Henry's magnificent four-poster bed, the tallboy supporting a model of the *Charlotte Garton*, lost off Foochow, the mahogany sideboard she used as a dressing-table ; the curtains, even the chairs were arranged exactly as they had been arranged in those earlier rooms. She would have no changes, not even in the order of the books in the recessed cupboard. She was reluctant to let anyone take a book from its shelf, and more likely than not the borrower, on the very day he borrowed it, would find it spirited out of his room and restored again to its place.

The love of order, of tradition, which was one of her most powerful impulses, existed side by side with another, to which it was akin—with the need to possess in the fullest possible manner the few persons who were actually part of her life. They were indeed few. She cared very little for her friends. All her genuine affections were kept for her family, her husband, her son, and when they grew up, her daughters. And now, for the first time, she began to have a dim idea that it was to herself, to her fierce possessiveness, that she owed most of her disappointments. The idea came to her in the shape of a memory. She recalled that Hugh had said to her, when she was torturing him with those futile questions that women ask their husbands ("Why didn't you warn me you were falling in love with this other woman?" "Why wasn't I enough for you?") : "You wanted too much.

You wanted me to be everything to you and nothing to myself." Ah, but that was because she was stupid, because she had to have a thing in her hand before she believed in it. Just as when she was a child she could not refrain from clutching handfuls of wild convolvulus, though she knew it would die that instant, because until she could feel it in her hands it gave her no pleasure.

No matter—so it had been with Hugh, and now with Richard. She began to cry, slow, angry tears that left her exhausted and shaken, they came from so far within her or from so distant a time in her life. She was losing her son now, and it was infinitely worse to her than had been the loss of her husband, since now she had no pride to support her. Her honesty, inflexible where she knew what she was doing, forced her to see herself not as Richard's mother, but as his enemy. She recalled a hundred occasions on which, by her attitude and her way of receiving his suggestions, she had made his position in the firm of no account. And it was not because she now thought he had been right and herself wrong that she found the memory of those moments unendurable, but because of the contrast they offered with her real feeling. Her pride in him, crossing her natural stubbornness and her love of power, had bred the rage and the contempt with which—loving him as she did—she had greeted his more audacious efforts.

She had tried to arrange his life for him, to keep him out of mischief—not from love, but because it was her nature to manage and arrange. Because she was a grasping possessive woman, a Garton, a Mark Henry without his masculine carelessness—in brief, a Garton woman in authority.

She started up and began to walk about the room. Once she paused to run her finger lovingly over a Queen Anne tallboy, so far do our bodies lag behind our minds in the learning of new lessons. Meanwhile her mind, pursuing the idea, stumbled on, as awkward as an infant learning to

walk. Could she ever learn to let be the people she loved ? Ever learn not to interfere, not to possess them so completely that they had neither air to breathe nor light to grow by ? She walked up and down, between Mark Henry's bed and the *Charlotte Garton*, trying to find her way about a world in which these were the only familiar landmarks. Towards midnight Hugh was startled by her appearance in his room. He was sitting up in bed, reading. At the sight of him, so like and so unlike her young husband, she forgot what she had come to say, and said : " I can't stand it any longer, Hughie."

He wrapped his quilt round her. " What can't you stand ? "

" This living. What do I live for, Hugh ? I was young, and I'm getting old. I'm forty-four, the best is gone—and I don't know what it's all been for, and what it means. I've made mistakes—first I lost you, then Sylvia, and now Richie. Why do these things happen to *me ?* I've tried. I'm a fool. I can't see any sense in it. I know that we're supposed to get our reward hereafter, but that won't give me back you and the young days, and my babies. What is it for, Hughie ? Tell me that."

" Your feet are cold," Hugh said. " Let me warm them for you."

She watched him for a moment. " I love you so much, Hugh."

" Yes, I know. Poor Mary."

Her heart stood still. " You're sorry for me ? "

He looked at her with a smile. " You do everything *so much*," he said sweetly. " You waste yourself on people who are not capable of you. You're wasteful, extravagant—and very dear to me."

" Why don't people want me so much as I want them ? " Mary said sorrowfully.

" Perhaps because you want them too much."

" Ah—I was afraid of that."

" Are your feet warmer, my sweet ? "

" Yes. Did I want you too much, Hugh ? Was that why you left me ? "

Hugh clasped her knees between his hands. " Don't talk about that now," he said in a low voice.

" Please, Hugh. If you'll answer me this question I'll never ask any more. I promise you. Just this one."

Hugh's face was distorted by a strange reflexion, less pain than a reminiscence of it. " You shouldn't ask these things," he stammered. " It's old history. I was another man then, a young man, young fool."

" Very well," Mary said listlessly.

Hugh glared at her with a fury of which he was quite unconscious and which sprang from his reluctance to make her suffer. " It wasn't only that you were too absorbed in your ships," he said furiously, " that you forgot me for the greater part of your time. That hurt my vanity. I was too fine a fellow to stand that. But there was the other thing. You expected too much of our marriage. You wanted a kind of absolutism in loving that I couldn't manage. It was splendid, but it was unbearable. I had to get outside it, to be free." He saw that she winced. " Forgive me," he said angrily. " It was my failure. I hadn't enough intelligence or courage or decency."

" It's all right," Mary said wildly. " No one's hurt—except that girl." The agony she felt was not her own ; it belonged to the young woman disclosed in her by his words, an agony so old that it had separated itself from her and taken on a life of its own. She caught sight of it and moved her ground. Though a few moments ago she had spoken with regret of her youth, she had no wish to come on it in such a place, any more than we care to meet again in later life a person who will remind us of the worst thing that ever happened to us.

" I know what you mean, Hugh. It's what I was thinking of just now. Thanks very much for telling me. You do know I'm stupid, don't you ? I never understand anything until I've fallen over it twice." She chuckled

shyly. "You can give up glaring at me, Hughie. I'm not going to talk about it again."

"Am I glaring?" Hugh said gently. "What a fool I am!—I like you so much."

"Is it true?"

"Yes. Let's go away at once—to-morrow."

An expression with which he was familiar came over her face—the familiar mingling of obstinacy and doubt which it wore when she had made up her mind to do a thing and before she had made a show of asking his advice about it.

"I came to see you about that. Richard said this evening that he'd like to go out to New Orleans with Captain James in the *Mark Henry*. I thought we might make the trip with him," she said doubtfully. "Would you like it? You know—Richard has sailed in her before."

"Quite. When you and that fellow Hardman went in her to Bordeaux."

"Shall I tell you about that, Hugh?"

"If you like," Hugh said carelessly. He jumped up. "Don't imagine I was never jealous," he exclaimed. "I went through torments at the time. I can't understand why you were willing to run away with the fellow: you declined to do as much for me—I wanted you to give up Danesacre and your shipyard when you married me, and you wouldn't."

"I had you without giving them up," Mary said simply. "It was only by giving up everything else that I could have Gerry at all."

He stared at her and burst out laughing. "God bless my soul, I never thought of that. How simple—and how sensible of you. Would you have paid it, if I'd put the same price on myself?"

"Don't be stupid, Hughie," she said drily. "Gerry didn't put this price on himself, it was put on by the way things are."

"Yes, I know, I know. I was laughing at myself. Tell me the rest and let's be done with it from to-night."

"I've forgotten most of it," she murmured. "When you went away with Fanny Jardine I'd lost confidence—if you understand me. I assure you I thought very little of myself."

"Are you trying to tell me that the fellow gave you self-confidence?" Hugh said ironically.

"I loved him very much," Mary said honestly. "It was like going back to the beginning; I tried to think that nothing had happened since I fell in love with him at fifteen—no Archie—no apprenticeship to Mark Henry, no ships, nothing. But you had happened." She stopped, unable to say what she knew. "If I've anything to feel proud of, it is that I was married to you," she exclaimed.

"I left you," Hugh said, in a sharpened voice.

"It's of no importance. You should know that, my dearest dear. You can't efface a marriage like ours. It lasts out the other things." She sighed with relief and an exquisite happiness. "Now I've told you all that, I can go to sleep. Undo this quilt, Hughie." Her glance fell on the book he had dropped. "What were you reading when I came in?"

"About marriage," he said smiling. "What do you think of this? '*Let us be very strange and well bred: let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while and as well bred as if we were not married at all.*'"

"What you were reading I was thinking," Mary exclaimed. She gave him a soft subtle smile. "We've been strange for years."

"Shall I carry you or lend you my slippers?" Hugh said. He put them on for her and helped her to shuffle along the passage in them, chuckling under her breath like a little girl. He came back to his room and his bed, disturbed and angry—because he had not been able to meet her half-way. Less than half-way: she had come to his

room, offered herself to him with unimaginable gentleness and courage, in which there was something shy and defiant—like the advances made out of politeness or affection by a child—that reminded him of the young girl he had first seen riding in Hyde Park, in a fine plum-coloured habit. For a moment the girl's face, so long buried under all he now knew of her, came to the surface of his mind, bright and distinct, like an image flung on a darkened screen. He started up at the thought that at this moment his arms, his shoulders, his whole body might be comforting and comforted by hers. She would not have felt it strange to lie beside him again.

Yet, so much more potent than our desires are our habits, that the next time she came to him he would not find it the easiest thing in the world to give her an *If thou wilt stay, leap in mine arms ;* though she was in his blood and in his most cherished thoughts. Thrusting quilt and book both off his bed, he turned round and went to sleep.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE thought of an unreconciled Sylvia filled Mary's mind during the weeks before the *Mark Henry* sailed. She would not risk writing to the girl again, and when September came she drove to Danesacre over the moors, reversing the journeys she used to make from the old Danesacre yard to Mark Henry's embryonic engine works on the Tees. She passed above Roxby House, the stone tiles of its roof spreading like a pool of clear grey water between two folds of the moor. Bright yellow flowers, like tiny suns, swam in the blackness at the roots of the heather. The moor itself was so quiet, drowsing under the hot sun, that she felt her own uneasiness the more keenly. But surely when she saw, standing humbly at her door, the mother she must have been thinking of as many miles away, the girl would be startled into showing the love and delight she actually felt. So she tried to make herself believe, as the carriage crawled down the steep hill to Sylvia Russell's house.

It stood at the end of a street, and half-way down the hill, a very small house, with two windows, one above the other, and a pear tree nailed against the side wall. Below it, a long grassy slope, almost perpendicular, and covered with harsh quaking grass, ran down from the edge of the road to the railway, here a stretch of glittering rails running from the station into the mysterious recesses of the engine room—beyond them, the harbour. The tide was out and gulls were walking about the stretches of livid mud, between which, a strange no-colour, as if the reflexions of the sky and of the bed of the harbour had met near the surface and neutralised one another, slept the shrunken water. A faint uneasiness, like the subtle wrinkling of thought on a child's face, passed over it, a signal, con-

veyed almost imperceptibly from the water of the lower harbour, that the tide had just turned. Exactly opposite Sylvia's house, on the other side of the harbour, was the old Garton Yard and Mark Henry Garton's house, in which Sylvia had been born.

To catch sight, in the distance, of the house in which we have spent our childhood and those years between childhood and the moment when we realise, in our bodies if not in our minds, that we are not immortal, is more moving than actually to return to it. To return is a mistake, since we take with us into rooms that remember us only as young and inexperienced, our tired bodies and the ideas and memories for which we have exchanged those others, less substantial but kinder and easier to live with, of our youth. We see them with eyes accustomed now to a different way of living, softer perhaps, more careful certainly, and we are disappointed. They seem to us dingy, since the light we brought to them before is put out, and uncomfortable, since we are no longer able to see moving about in them, busy and instinctive, a younger self to whom they were deliciously friendly and familiar : we exclaim : " How could I have been happy here ! " forgetting that the I who was happy in these shadowy awkward rooms is no longer alive, or, even though he may be alive, is as estranged from the person we now are as if the two spoke different languages or had lived in opposite quarters of the world—far wider estranged, since the gulf that divides them is not space but time.

More fortunate than returning to a house, is to look at it across a space which—while it allows us to see quite clearly the windows we know better from the other side—draws back for us the unfamiliar curtains and represents in our minds not merely so many hundred feet of dividing ground but so many years, the years since we lived in it. So that we imagine we have found a way of overlooking time, and that if we were only a little nearer we could recapture, in colours as fresh as the year it was minted,

any one of those days when though nothing particular happened, everything was possible and we ran and laughed and sighed for no reason except that we were alive. Happier, more alive, than we have ever been since.

Mary felt that if she could only look at Mark Henry Garton's house from the upper windows of Sylvia's house she would be able to see not only the old Yard, but another ship than the one now on the stocks, and watching it, from the wall at the bottom of the garden, a small stolid child, herself, held between delight in the sounds and sights of the Yard and the fear, more exciting than unpleasant, that Miss Flora would find her there and snatch her back into the house and to the genealogy of the Jewish kings. She trembled with excitement as she climbed the fifteen irregular steps that led to Sylvia's small garden, thrust out at that height above the road like the bridge of a ship over the waves. Probably Sylvia herself would open the door, and in the dark little passage would fling herself into her mother's arms. Then would come the invitation : " Come upstairs to my bedroom and take off your things." And then, laying her hat on the bed, she would be able to hurry to the window and exclaim : " But, Sylvia, you can see right into the Yard from here ! "

Her eyes sparkled and her hand, as she lifted it to the knocker, shook violently. She let it fall without knocking. The room on the left of the door, the only room downstairs at the front of the house, had a window which came almost to the ground. She had caught sight of Sylvia at the far side of the room, sitting sideways on her chair, her head bent over a dress on to which she was stitching a coloured flounce. Behind her was a black horsehair couch with enormously high ends, curved like the prow of a ship. The rug at her feet was a vivid blue, so vivid that it seemed to reflect on the walls of the little room a faint tinge like the rays of blue light thrown on to the pavement from one of those enormous bottles of

coloured water in a chemist's window. Something, some quality of the light or a shadow cast by the young tree outside the window, had emptied Sylvia's face of colour. But if her face was older, her body, drooping over a piece of sewing such as Mary had never seen in her hand since she was a little girl, was childish in its lack of curves and in the attitude, at once careless and expectant, in which she had disposed it on the edge of the chair. There was nothing in it of that Sylvia Russell whom Mary had been afraid to face, as if the bare room, the unfamiliar occupation, the solitude—there were no signs in the room of any other person living in the house—forcing her back on herself, had released in her, dreaming and untroubled, a girl in whom no trace remained of the life she was now living.

Turning away, so that she should seem not to have seen her sitting there, Mary knocked at the door. Her first knock had no answer. She was afraid to turn her head to look into the little room. She knocked again. The door was flung back, reminding her by the violence of its opening of the door that had opened on herself and Charlotte more than thirty years ago, in an ambiguous little house in South London. She started forward. Sylvia faced her without the slightest gesture of invitation. Her cheeks were crimson enough now. Her eyes blazing, her thin body poked forward, she had the air of defending the shadowy passage behind her from an unexpected assault. "What do you want?" she asked.

"I came to see you," Mary said. "I'm going away for several weeks."

"Have you come to offer William a place in the firm?"

"No."

"I don't want to see you," Sylvia cried. She shut the door at once, and Mary heard the sound of a bolt drawn across it and a second later the shutting of another door inside the house. She leaned against the wall, overcome with disappointment and shame. She felt old, old; the hand she put out to steady herself was the unfamiliar hand

of an old woman. She shrank back against the door, afraid that if Sylvia's neighbour had heard the raised voice she would look out of her window and see, walking down the path to the steps, a mother who had been turned from her daughter's house.

The harbour had changed. Already, during the few moments in which she had had her back to it, the tide had begun to creep up over the flats : the gulls, feeling the water on their slender legs, drew them up and wheeled with sharp cries over the ship moored in mid-stream. When she reached the foot of the steps she could no longer see over the wall into the garden of Mark Henry's house, and the Yard from this level was less familiar and half disenchanted. She walked to the end of the street where she had left her carriage, trying to pull her hat down to shadow her eyes. There was no need for everyone to see what had happened to her.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE *Mark Henry* left Middlesbrough on September the sixteenth with a contrary wind. The wind came round for her in an hour or so, and Mrs. James prophesied from that omen a quick and fortunate passage. "Mind what I tell you, hinny," she said to Richard, "the finger of God's on her beam. I've seen it there before now and it never fails." The voyage out was as short as she could have wished, thinking of the sea, as she did, only as an obstacle set between her and the ports she loved. The world for Mrs. James consisted of its coast lines; the land behind them seemed to her emptier, more chaotic, and more tiresome than the sea, in which nevertheless she could distinguish as many features and colours as a farmer in the variety of his fields. She had never been nearer Rome than Civita Vecchia, which it would have surprised her to learn was not the Eternal City: in London, though she penetrated as far as Hyde Park, where she sat with an air of delicate contempt to eat the lunch put up for her by the steward as for a long and dangerous journey, she admired far more the streets and shops round Fenchurch Street and spent a great deal of her time with her face pressed to haberdashers' windows, delighting in the ties and socks she had too much sensibility to ask Captain James to wear.

To every port where she was known she carried useful presents for her friends—carefully labelled and arranged in her wardrobe in the order of the voyage: in strange ports she added industriously to her Household Book, now numbering six hundred and fifty pages, covered in her fine, gentle hand; the fading ink of the earlier pages was a lesser hindrance to the curious reader than Mrs. James's spelling, which made a receipt for a Tansy as difficult to decipher as a newly-discovered inscription in an Assyrian

temple. The cabin she had shared with Captain James since the day he brought her on board was as much a projection of her mind as might be a lyric of the poet's who wrote it, as fine, as delicate in what it said and profound in what it omitted. The walls were a mosaic of photographs of her friends, stiff and inexpressive to any eye but hers, for whom at a glance they unbent, becoming amiable, garrulous, and appealing, echoing with their smiling lips the thoughts of her own gentle mind. Every piece of furniture doubled with its more obvious function that of a cupboard, in which she kept the gowns, hats, muffs and scarves she wore ashore, a silk dress for every fifth year since she married, and a box of pieces, fragments of silk of every colour, from which, between ports, she composed the quilts she presented to the agent's wife in her favourite towns. She slept with Captain James in a real bed, clamped to the floor, under the wide fine sheets she had worked with an initial the size of her hand, and behind a red muslin curtain ; even in a light wind the rings fastening it to the brass rail clashed faintly, like the sound of distant horns, broken and distorted by the perpetual mutter of the waves : during rough nights, when Captain James was on the bridge, she sat up in bed and sewed without ceasing or looked again through a flat, immense book of views of Japan, the only book she had, and the only country possessing a notable coast-line to which she had never been. Her imagination, since she never opened the book except in stormy weather, pictured Japan as an island of soundless forests, still waterfalls, and exquisite vistas, set in the midst of raging seas which ran against its shores with bared teeth and were thrown back in showers of fine crystalline drops, like the slender jets of fountains.

Her brass-bound medicine chest stood in a corner, stuffed with the dried herbs from which, in fever-ridden ports, she made the Drops and Waters to ward off the plague. Her Household Book contained, between a

receipt for trotter jelly and another for oister soope (Mrs. Tashys way), a cordiall good against any infexions, such as the plague, poxe, meesells, burning feaver, and to remove any offensiv or venemous matter from the Stomacke or Hart, or to be used after surfetts or in Passion of the Mother, and to comforte and strengthen nature. Her last civility, before leaving port, was to carry a bottle of this draught to the wife of the agent and the agent's clerk with a gentle precise warning of its quality and effects : when she said that it would cure an aching heart she was attributing to it a spiritual potency such as she would have ascribed to her shy daily prayers, or, if she had been a Roman Catholic, to the administration of the last Sacrament. Under Captain James, of whose dignity she was more careful than of her own, she governed the ship, by her kindness and simplicity, the perfection of which showed itself no more in the few words she addressed to a new apprentice than in the air, at once mild and regal, with which, from her station on the bridge, she received the greetings and salutations that pointed the *Mark Henry's* arrival in a familiar port. To a remark such as : " Good-morning, Mrs. James, we expected you last week," she would reply civilly and coldly, wounded by the idea that the *Mark Henry* had made a slow passage. To a more mannerly greeting she unbent at once, her face covered in smiles, and her plump strong hands waving the immense embroidered satin handkerchief she kept for use at these times.

The *Mark Henry* was a finely-modelled boat, beautifully sparred, a very lofty ship, crossing a main skysail yard, and still carrying all her stunsails at a time when even a fore topmast stunsail was beginning to be looked upon as a curiosity. Indeed to the day of his retirement Captain James declined to make any concessions to new fashions in rigging. He preferred her to look as she had looked the day he took her over, and in much the same spirit as he bowed out of his cabin an agent who suggested that Mrs.

James was beginning to show her age, he got rid at the end of the voyage of an officer who had commented uncivilly on the *Mark Henry's* skysails. She was as docile as a well-behaved and affectionate child. Everything that a ship could do she did, everything he asked of her, with an exquisite ease and lightness—like a queen in storm, like a ghost in light airs—as if she knew that neither men nor the sea would ever see her like again.

Mary sat on deck, her hands idly folded, while the *Mark Henry* slipped along under a sky as smooth and brilliant as a blue crystal, in which the light hammer-strokes of the wind rang with an airy sound. When Richard talked to her about New Orleans she answered him with a serene air, as if New Orleans were a city at which she longed to arrive. She recalled an evening before his first term at school when, as she took him up to bed, he said suddenly : " If these stairs never came to an end I needn't go away in the morning." Now it was she to whom the end of the journey would cause an anguish all the sharper in that it sprang from a part of her mind into which she could not penetrate. She knew, without being able to guess the source of her knowledge, that he would not come back. When he talked of coming home at the end of four or five years, she smiled and said : " Give me six months' warning and I'll come out to meet you." But she knew she would not need to make the journey. And since it never occurred to her that she might die, and since Richard would naturally outlive her, she imagined a dozen reasons for her inexplicable certainty. At last she ceased to question and began, since there was no going forward, to go back through her memories of him until she came to the lawns of Roxby House and a fat laughing baby. There at last she was safe, and there, for a time, she could stay, so that when Richard spoke to her she answered him out of a happiness that denied him in the very moment of making him safe for ever. Her son was leaving her. Her son was still

chuckling, naked and sprawling, at the white tumbled clouds above Roxby House. In another part of her mind she knew that the airy structure she was building would fall in on her before long. She was like a mother who falls asleep, worn out with grief, and dreams that the son of whose death she has just been told is waiting for her at the entrance to a splendid new house, which is his own and in which she is going to live with him for ever ; she walks with him through the rooms, charmed with everything, admiring and content, until the moment when she feels that he is no longer beside her, and turning from side to side, alone again and in despair, she runs down a dark road and at the end finds herself struggling not to wake in the world from which she thought she had escaped.

They reached Vera Cruz at two o'clock in the morning, when its houses, coloured like flowers, slept, sunk in the faint light. It lay in a low plain. At this hour nothing marked the division between the open roadstead and the land ; the town might have been built in the sea itself. Seen from the deck of the *Mark Henry* it had an air of flat unreality, like one of those gay little cities painted on the bottom of glass paper-weights, which become real only when we look at them from above. Light poured over it suddenly.

As soon as she woke, Mrs. James got out her present for the agent's wife—four pounds of the finest Ceylon tea. She explained to Mary that tea in Vera Cruz was dear and bad, and that nothing she could bring Mrs. Charles Sanderson would make her smile as much as the sight of this rounded tin, with its pictures of dancing bears, pinafored children, and soldiers in scarlet jackets. Towards noon she took Mary ashore with her to breakfast at the hotel, where she told her she would find not only the agent and the agent's wife, but every respectable person in the neighbourhood. In Vera Cruz a house did not expect to be used for meals—it took care to have no

kitchen—and except for their seven o'clock cup of tea its tenants took their food at the hotel, on the verandah of which Mary met Mrs. Charles Sanderson, clad in a gown that she considered too thin and too careless.

The agent's wife was a pale slender young woman, with a fretful voice. Over her face, like a shadow flung on it by the muslin blind, was drawn a barely visible network of fine lines. She was twenty-five. She had a trick of repeating the last words of what was said to her, as if the effort of attention crushed her, so that it was only by hanging on to the tail of the sentence just vanishing out of her sight that she managed to remain upright and undissolved.

"How do you do?" Mary said civilly.

"Do," echoed Mrs. Sanderson. "Why, badly enough. It's time I went home again. This place will shrink me to a bone."

"You've a lovely house," Mary said, to whom on their way to the hotel Mrs. James had pointed out its long low front, coloured like the inside of an oyster shell.

"Lovely house," the younger woman said vaguely. "Only last week we emptied fifteen buckets of sand out of it after what they call a norther. I can't have anything nice. It would be spoiled at once." She turned to her husband with an air of resentful mockery. "Isn't it true what I say, Charles? You can't deny it, can you?" Her voice was light and railing.

Charles Sanderson looked at his wife with a strange heavy attention, as if he were still, after six years of marriage, trying to understand what she meant. He smiled unwillingly; he thought too much of her not to smile at her sallies, but he wished she would spare him them in front of strangers. "It's no place for an Englishwoman," he said, speaking in a soft dragging voice. "I shall send Mrs. Sanderson home before long."

"She might care to return with us," Mary said politely. She turned pale at the thought that she would have to

see this fretful young woman seated in Richard's place in the *Mark Henry's* saloon. She turned away.

"Where's your little girl?" Mrs. James exclaimed.

"Little girl—I left her in the house—she's poorly again, of course. She says her head aches. I told her that little girls don't have headaches, and she said in that case she hadn't a head."

"I'll go and look at her after breakfast," Mrs. James said briskly. "I know what she needs. Has she had anything to eat this morning? It works better on an empty stomach."

Mrs. Sanderson's laughter, issuing from her pale lips, suggested irresistibly the girl, prettiest daughter of a Cornish farmer, whose body, younger than her face and voice, she had not yet laid aside.

"When I saw the *Mark Henry* in the roads this morning, I said: 'There now, Elsie, Mrs. James will soon make you well.' I gave her a cup of tea and tried to make her comfortable. But she turns and twists until the sheet's round her feet and then she says I haven't made the bed properly. You'd think she was fifty instead of being only five. I'm so glad you've come." She hesitated. "You and your cordial waters!" she cried, biting her lip, at the corner of which a dimple, surprised to find itself in Vera Cruz, whisked out of sight the moment it appeared.

Elsie sat up in bed at the sound of Mrs. James's voice. "Blessed darling," she cried fervently. "I *prayed* for you." Her hands, like the claws of a tiny animal, sunk themselves in Mrs. James's neck. "My head aches, and I feel as weak as a little tommy tit—whatever that may be. It's one of those birds mother used to know." Her dark eyes, appearing suddenly over Mrs. James's shoulder, gave Mary a shock; they were old, and incredibly experienced, the eyes of an ageing woman, in which are reflected, in the shape of two points of light, all the memories of her long gay youth. Her attitude

to her mother was a replica of that young woman's to her husband—mocking, faintly resentful, and surprised—as if she were sorry for her and ashamed of her at the same time. " Darling Mrs. James," she murmured, " there isn't such a bird, is there ? " She put her tiny head on one side and laughed breathlessly. " She says it says Chip, chip ! I don't believe her, do you ? Oh, lovely one, how cool you are and hideous, like one of their old images. I adore you."

Mrs. Sanderson let one of her sudden spirts of laughter escape : they jetted out of her for an instant and were cut short at once. " You mustn't call Mrs. James an image."

" She's my image," Elsie said pleasantly. " I worship her." Disengaging herself from Mrs. James she offered Mary her hand. " How d'ye do ? " she whispered languidly. " You're the owner, aren't you ? " She gave her mother an ironical glance, as much as to say : ' Don't be afraid, I'm not going to give away the things you've said about her.' As Mary took her hand she dropped back on her pillows, losing in the same moment her air of animation and of a fashionable old lady. Flushed and childish, she looked imploringly at Mrs. James. Her small body vanished altogether under the frills of her pink nightdress. " You will make me better, won't you, my dove, my darling ? "

" Not only make you better, but take you home with me," Mrs. James said comfortably. " Home to England."

" You'll see the birds your mother talks about," Mary promised.

" Are you sure ? I'll believe it if *you* say so." Elsie stretched out one yellow arm. " By God, I'm nothing but skin and bone," she murmured.

" Elsie ! " her mother cried. Mrs. James asked her to send a man to the ship for the brass-bound medicine chest. Then, taking off her hat, she settled down to persuade Elsie to sleep.

Towards evening, taking Mary with her, she left the house to walk along the shore. Mary helped her to collect handfuls of the tiny coloured shells she meant to put into bottles and give to her sister's children. She handed them over to Mary to take back with her to the ship. "I shall stay the night here," she said. "That child's no better." She seemed depressed, as if the failure of the cordial waters to revive Elsie at a draught were a reflection on herself. "I'll give it her full strength to-morrow," she murmured. "That German doctor of theirs is a fool. He kept on talking to me in his ridiculous language until I had to leave the room. I didn't think it fit for a decent woman to stay. Why, he might have been saying anything!"

In the morning, when Mrs. James joined her at the hotel, she announced her intention of staying with the Sandersons when the *Mark Henry* went on to New Orleans. "She can pick me up on her way home. There's only one thing about it, hinny. Last time we was there I saw a shawl in the window of a shop in Canal Street—black silk with a crimson bird"—she pronounced it "bod"—"worked across it. Great wings he had, and a necklace of green and purple flowers hanging from his long neck. They was asking twice what it was worth, and I wouldn't have it, but many's the day since I've wished I'd let myself go on it. The other night I woke up and there that great bod was, poking his neck across me in my own bed. I put my hand out and he flopped down and stalked away through the closed door without turning a feather. That's how I knew I was dreaming. 'Well,' I said to myself, 'I'll have you after that, my fine fellow, if I can get you short of going on my knees to the wicked little Eyetalian behind the counter.' If I was to tell you the name, will you see if it's still there and get it for me, hinny? It isn't often I see a thing I want for myself."

The *Mark Henry* left New Orleans without the captain's wife, and Captain James, who had never been

known to make a remark that was not instantly necessary, now became entirely silent, conversing with the steward and the mate in a peculiar dumb show of his own invention. When Mary spoke to him, he wagged his head in an amiable confusion, unable to explain to her that his wife's absence had deprived him of the use of his tongue as much as if she had taken it away with her in one of her immense pockets, together with a ditty bag, a bottle of aniseed water, a flash of cherry brandy, two whalebones and a pair of woollen slippers.

In New Orleans they dined several times with the Garton agent. He had married a wealthy woman, the daughter of a Spanish shipper; her home was very different from poor Mrs. Sanderson's. Mary's mind busied itself at first with the elegance, utterly unlike that of her own house, she saw displayed in every part of Mrs. James Brashwind's newly-built house. The white-panelled walls, the teak floors, the grouped silver candlesticks, the strong delicately-modelled chairs and bowfats in strange light woods, the lovely fragile glass, made a picture of which the beauty was as much in its spaces as in the shapes and colours that composed it. She admired it, but in her heart of hearts she preferred the solid magnificence of her own house at home. It was heavy, but it was good. No doubt this was good, in its way, but she liked the English way of goodness better. There one had no need to look at a piece of furniture twice to see whether it was the real thing: its weight alone would tell you that. These rooms would be bare if they were not filled by a peculiarly solid flood of light, filtering through the blinds: it was as solid as water compared with the pure limpid northern light, and yet it was intoxicating. So Richard said.

He walked about New Orleans in a fine state of excitement, his eyes sparkling and his body moving as if it were an effort to keep it on the ground. Mary found the air less rousing than at home, and Hugh frankly disliked it. He

said it made him feel old. He went about with a pinched look and a constant puckering of his forehead. He complained that his head had ached ever since they landed. Mary was anxious about him ; she began to feel sorry that they had come to New Orleans at all. It would have been better to let Richard go alone. As it was, he was counting the hours until he could leave New Orleans for Santa Fé. He wanted to know whether it was true, as he had been told, that the air of New Mexico was light and clean and untamed, as if there were no men. His mother felt that he was quite sincere when he declared that four or five years was nothing ; it actually did seem to him a shorter time than these days during which he was kept hanging about New Orleans until the *Mark Henry* had finished taking in her cargo of cotton for Liverpool. He did not want to leave her, but he wanted to be off. He had had enough of New Orleans, of the avenues of magnolias and cedars, of the gardens full of orange trees, roses, cactus and rosemary, of the constant soft chatter of mixed tongues, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Indian, Scandinavian, American.

Two days before the *Mark Henry* was due to leave, they went to dine with the Brashwinds for the last time. Mary kept her eyes open for new dishes and new ways of serving them, so that she could tell Mrs. James about them when they went back to Vera Cruz. She even went so far as to ask for a receipt, though she knew that in doing so she was incurring the contempt of James Brashwind's Spanish wife. Richard gave her a reproachful look, but she persisted, and when the receipt, offered with Mariquita Brashwind's flawless civility, had been written down and brought to her by two black man servants, one who carried the tray and another who offered it to her, she took it with a regal air. She thought so much ceremony ridiculous in an agent's wife, however wealthy and well-born. Besides, she could never get it into her head that the Spanish, as much as the French, were the real aristo-

crats here. She thought of them as inferior Europeans, and of herself as very broadminded because she could admire, whole-heartedly, their houses and their dresses and even their food, while smiling at the airs they adopted. She was as grand as they were in her way, but she was not conscious of that.

At this dinner they met for the second time Brashwind's young sister-in-law. Enriquetta de Narváez was exactly what his wife had been when he married her, small, slender, with dark hair and grey smiling eyes, her face exquisitely formed, her mouth like a flower about to open. Her movements were sudden and graceful, like the springs and turnings of a young cat. At the table she sat between Richard and Hugh, answering when they spoke to her and the rest of the time saying nothing. She was the most beautiful young creature Mary had ever seen, and she saw that Richard could scarcely keep his eyes from her. When dinner was over he sat watching her as she played the piano that Brashwind had had brought from New York : his wife, for whom he had bought it because she told him she had enjoyed playing at her convent in Charleston, never opened it ; she did nothing at all, sitting hour after hour with folded hands waiting for him to come home and begin to talk to her. Then her face changed, breaking up in bright gleaming surfaces like a painting seen too close.

Enriquetta played a quick, light, martial air : the notes did not so much flow as march away from her fingers, themselves the exact shade of the keys, gay and simple, in twos and fours, retreating, advancing, deploying to left and right, off they went, company by airy company, to die mysteriously in the opaque shadows of the garden on the daggers of a thick spiky hedge at the end of an avenue of pecan trees.

Mary glanced at Hugh. He was sitting with his hand over his eyes, and her heart stood still with anxiety and love. Why had she dragged him out here with her ? He

hated it. He had wanted to stay with her alone in some small quiet French town, but he had come out here instead, without a word, because she had arranged it. It was the old mistake. She must always arrange and plan, she could never accept things. She could not let Richard go all at once, and so she had come with him to New Orleans, to a climate that was making Hugh ill. It had been the wrong thing to do. Even Richard would have been better off without her. I do everything wrong, she thought fiercely: I am a stupid woman. She was feverishly anxious now to get away. She wanted to have Hugh to herself, to see him lose the look of strain and delicacy which contrasted so sharply with Brashwind's sun-blackened face and short strong body. The voyage home would mend him. She could hardly wait for the moment, still two days off, when the *Mark Henry* would move away from the levee, leaving behind her the line of boats tied to wooden piles, the negro women in their red and orange calico, the pale girls selling flowers, the shabby houses with their ruined slave quarters on the east bank of the river. And yet that would be her last sight of Richard for five years. Five years! If she could persuade herself that it was only for five years he had gone, she would be able to bear it more easily. She looked at him now. He was saying something to the young Spanish girl, at which she laughed. Her face flowered into a shy admiration, and Mary was startled to see him turn a fine crimson. Surely he was not falling in love again—so quickly?

She decided that it was time to go back to their hotel. In the very moment of standing up, she saw the room in a new strange light, as if she were looking at it through a crystal. The yellow wood of a chair, a fine crack in the panelling behind it, the slender-stemmed glass in Hugh's hand, Mr. Brashwind's swarthy arrogant face, the fringe of his wife's shawl spreading across her dress like a wine-stain, Richard's young mouth, the candles placed on either side of an open window, their flames erect and motionless

in the still air—there they all were, and of them all only she felt the need to set her back against the force that was bearing them away. She wanted to cry out to the others that they must look at it while it was still there. You must look at it and remember it, she thought quickly : someone must remember it, remember, remember. No one would remember it except herself. She was filled with dismay by the thought that when she died, this moment, and the candle-lit room, and the living faces of the men and women for whom it existed, would be lost as completely as if they had never been. The thought that anything she had had could vanish completely seemed monstrous to her.

She said good-bye to Mrs. Brashwind, who made her a fine elaborate curtsey, like those with which Miss Flora greeted gentlemen from the time she was a little girl to the day she died. Mary could not bring herself to behave as ceremoniously. She bowed twice, stiffly and haughtily, to Mrs. Brashwind, kindly to her young sister. She nodded to Brashwind. She would see him again before the ship left. In her heart she disliked this man, so polite, so efficient, and so determinedly the Southern gentleman. She disliked the heavy drawling of his voice from word to word. If he had not been an American she would have been less disapproving of the state in which he lived.

They drove past the City Hall, modelled in white marble after the temple of Minerva at Athens, on the steps of which, by one of those gestures, human and pathetic, repeated in every age like a sign placed instead of a signature in the corner of an artist's canvas, the Confederate troops had received their colours before going off to the war. Mary thought it ridiculous of the architect to have copied a Grecian temple. Why had they no manner of their own ? She preferred the Creole-Spanish style of the Cathedral of St. Louis. At least it was not a mere copy.

Richard followed her into her room. He sat dangling his long legs from the arm of a chair until she could bear it no longer. "What is it you want, Richie?" she said at last.

He looked at her with a shy charming smile. "Would you mind very much if I didn't wait until the *Mark Henry* leaves?"

She was hurt. "But she'll have finished the day after to-morrow," she said in a startled voice. She checked herself at once. She must say and do nothing that would spoil the boy's pleasure in setting off. He must not think that she was going to be unhappy, or grudging. Yet it did not seem to occur to him that she had had to make an effort. She felt old and tired. She had loved him so much. And he was leaving her, he could not even wait to see her go.

"You don't like New Orleans," she said sadly.

"It's not just that." He hesitated and looked at her again with the same charming subtle smile. "I should like to go to Charleston," he said quickly. "I met a young man from there at the office this morning, when you were talking to Brashwind in his room. He's riding back, starting to-morrow. I could send my things on ahead. I liked him, and he knew where I could get a splendid horse. We went there and looked at one."

"You should have let Hugh look at it for you," she said. Her heart sank at the thought that he had arranged the whole thing before telling her about it. It was not like him to be secretive, or rather, it was a Roxby strain in him of which she had never, until these last months, seen a sign. It was as if the effect on him of Cynthia had been to wake and bring to the surface every buried Roxby instinct in his nature. He had changed since he knew her. Even his face, which had seemed a fined-down and masculine replica of her own, reminded her sometimes of Archie Roxby's—not in any feature of it, but in an expression that now and then passed over it, like the reflection

in the surface of a pond of clouds passing at a great height across the sky.

"It sounds nice," she said quietly. "Are you sure you like this young man?"

"Well enough," Richard said, smiling. "He's quite mad, though. He said that in thirty years' time America would be beating England to her markets. Did you ever hear such rant?"

At the same time he felt, what Mary could not, the peculiar grimness and the sense of power flowing from the half-civilised land. It roused him and made him uneasy. He wanted to follow it to its sources, to get at it and understand it. His mother neither felt nor cared anything about it: to her America was a raw clumsy tumbling sort of country with very little to commend it to her except the money she drew from sending her boats to its ports and building for it the ships it would never be able to build for itself. She half disliked and half mildly despised it. The remark made by Richard's casual friend did not even amuse her: it was too ridiculous and far-fetched.

"Yes, isn't it rant!" she exclaimed. "The man's a fool. Why do you want to take such a journey with him?"

Richard came across the room and stood behind her, so that she could not see his face. "Mrs. Brashwind's sister is going back to Charleston to-morrow, mother."

She twisted round to look at him. "So that's it," she said sharply. "Richard, you know nothing about her."

"But I haven't asked her to marry me yet," he cried, laughing at her. "I'm not nearly so light-minded as you seem to think. Don't you believe me, you absurd creature?"

"Then why are you going to Charleston after this girl? You never meant to go there. You had made quite different plans."

"The beauty of this new life," Richard said dreamily,

" is that I can change my plans every day, go just where I like, and fall in love three times a week."

" You won't be able to do any of those things when you're married," Mary said sarcastically.

" I'm not married yet," he teased her. " Because I like to look at a beautiful girl doesn't mean that I've fallen in love with her. Why should it ? "

" You'll find you won't see much of Mlle. de Narváez unless you marry her," his mother retorted. " *I* know these foreigners. You won't be allowed near her until they've made sure of you."

" Well, I might do worse," Richard said mischievously.

" You might do much better. She's Spanish, and a Roman Catholic—and she'll never put her foot to the ground outside your house from the day she marries. She'll grow just like her sister."

Richard's eyes sparkled. " I call Mrs. Brashwind a fine woman," he murmured.

" And I call her a very heavy one."

Richard put his arms round her and laughed with delight. " You dear," he said. " I do love you so much. Don't go back to England. Stay here with me and we'll go gallivanting through America together."

" A pretty figure I should make," Mary said, " gallivanting about the country at my age. I'm too old for that sort of thing now." But she was pleased he had said it.

" You'll never grow old," he said lovingly. " I shall come home in five years and find you younger and more beautiful than ever. You'll look up and say : ' Who is this large bearded stranger ? ' and I shall say : ' Don't you know me, mother ? ' And you'll fall into my arms."

" Not if you've grown a beard," Mary said demurely. " Go to bed now, my son. If you're starting a long ride to-morrow, you need all the sleep you can get."

She hurried to the window in the morning as soon as she opened her eyes. The sky had a strange naked look, as if all those scarcely perceptible veils which in England

come between the earth and the too great heat of the sun, had been stripped from it. The sun poured down its flood of solid-seeming light from a dome of intense startling blue. She dressed herself with as much care as if she were paying a visit to James Brashwind's Spanish wife. Richard's horse was to be brought round to the agent's office, and after breakfast she and Hugh walked there with him. He was very handsome in his London boots and breeches. The horse—Mary was relieved when she saw him—turned out to be a long low game-looking bay, with beautiful shoulders, a good back and long thoroughbred quarters. Hugh approved of him at sight.

"Now you see I can be trusted to pick out a horse," Richard said to his mother.

She laughed at him. "If you were as clever at choosing other things," she said gaily.

"Leave it to me," he said smiling. He gave her a quick comforting look. "I won't do anything you won't like. Bless you." He bent and kissed her passionately. "Good-bye, my dear, my love." He had knocked her hat over on one side and she straightened it, trembling. He shook hands with Hugh and said: "Good-bye, sir," in a curious gentle voice. He had a profound affection for his step-father.

"Good-bye," Mary said, and off he went, past a high white wall and an ornamental iron balcony, so heavy with flowers that it seemed cascading to the street in a green flood. She watched him out of sight. He was very gay and full of life. She was glad that he had gone off happy, and that she had a son who rode well and did everything that a man should do, decently and well. There was not a finer-looking young man in the whole of America. But her body felt old and finished. It felt that she no longer had a son. An almost insupportable pain passed through it, forcing her to lean against the wall of the Cotton Exchange.

" Can you walk ? " Hugh said.

She turned to glance at him. He had a strange look of exhaustion and weakness, as if it were an effort for him to move or speak. She gazed at him in terror. " You're ill, Hugh."

" No. I'm not. I'm perfectly all right. This sun hurts my head. Let's go home, my poor dear, let's go home."

She took his arm and they went back to the St. Charles Hotel, with its stars and stripes, cane chairs, and strident ubiquitous palms. She made him lie down on her bed, and in a little time she saw that he had fallen asleep. She bent over him. Withdrawn in sleep, his face had a pure, fine-bred, disdainful air. She was afraid, as if she had almost lost him. Thank God, we're going home to-morrow, she thought. He turned from side to side in his sleep and cried out.

The *Mark Henry* reached Vera Cruz at six o'clock in the morning. Mary was awake and half dressed when Captain James began talking in the narrow passage outside her berth. She flung open her door. " What did you say ? " He began again, awkward and ashamed. Charles Sanderson had come on board to tell them that Elsie had had a light attack of fever and was quite well again and out of quarantine. Mrs. James had gone down with fever two days ago and might be very ill : she was certainly very stubborn.

Mary finished her dressing quickly and went on shore with him. They found the Sanderson's house empty except for a yellow-faced nurse, sitting disconsolate in a window. Mrs. James would have nothing to do with her. She had shut herself in a bedroom with her medicine chest and an enormous bowl of cordial water and refused to let the nurse touch her. The woman was watching for the doctor ; when he came, she meant either to have her rights over the sick woman or to leave the house.

Mary cut her short and tried the handle of Mrs.

James's room. A voice which bore no trace of Mrs. James's asked her to go away. "It's Mary Hervey," she said anxiously. "Can you get up and unlock the door for me?"

"I could, but I won't," Mrs. James said.

"Excuse me, ma'am," Captain James whispered. He leaned against the door and said loudly: "It's onny me, hinny. Let me in."

The bolt moved easily. He stepped inside and Mary slipped in after him. Mrs. James had pushed her bed so close to the door that she could lay her hand on the bolt as readily as on her bowl of cordial water. "I won't have that woman in here," she said at once, "making fun of me to th'doctor."

"Well, you shan't," Mary said. "I'll stay with you myself."

When the doctor came he jerked his shoulders at the sight of the cordial waters, but he did not forbid them. He prescribed calomel and sweet nitre, and he seemed to think that since nothing was much use, Mrs. James might as well have what she liked. His manner annoyed Mary, and the thought that she had to depend on him for what chance there was of helping Mrs. James filled her with alarm. She asked him if there was nothing more she could do. "Do what I tell you," he snapped. Mary stiffened. He wrote out for her a series of instructions, and handed them to her with a melancholy bow. She saw that most of them related to herself. "But I am not ill," she protested. He appeared to be looking through his pockets for the retort he finally produced.

"Even an Englishwoman is subject to the laws of nature, in Vera Cruz," he said ironically.

A change came over Mrs. James when she heard the nurse leaving the house. "I couldn't bear her, hinny," she whispered. Her face grew placid. She allowed Mary to straighten her bed, in which the least movement of the pillows dislodged first one and then another of the things

she had hidden there—a bag full of her "pieces," the petticoat into whose band she had stitched her money, three small coloured shells, the photograph of a fat staring child, and a shabby doll of Elsie's. As her illness advanced, wrenching and humiliating her poor body, her face changed again. It became childlike and resolute. All her movements now were those of a shy civil little girl. The modesty with which she was dying withdrew from her one by one the years that had turned Captain James's young wife into old Mrs. James, with her cordials, her surfeit waters, her second, third, and fourth best silk, and her friends in two score of ports. Her lips moved gently, and leaning over her, Mary found that she was repeating, in the docile voice of a child learning a lesson, the two or three words of French she had taught herself, to startle her young husband. Her face shone with a new innocent assurance. She who had never been able to learn any tongue but her own and had learned only its simplest words, was talking like a native the universal language of death.

Towards evening Mary remembered the shawl she had bought for her in New Orleans. Unable to find the one Mrs. James had coveted, she had searched every shop until she found one nearly like it. It was lying in the next room. She brought it and spread it out in front of her. A faint look of reproach and disappointment came over Mrs. James's face.

"Yes, it's very nice, hinny," she said gently. "I liked the crimson bod better. I daresay you hadn't time, though."

"I couldn't find the other," Mary said humbly.

"Never mind, hinny. Put it where I can see it." Mary hung it over the end of the bed and Mrs. James looked carefully away from it.

In the next room Captain James was turning over the pages of a large dog-eared book. He found what he wanted, and began to read it, muttering the words to him-

self. Mary looked over his shoulder and read : "We know of no drug which will arrest yellow fever."

"But Mrs. James hasn't got yellow fever," she said.

"She might ha' onny coloured fever in Vera Cruz," he said gently. "It says here—turpentine and sulphuric ether for the black vomit." He got up and hurried into the bedroom, with the book open under his arm. "Has 'ter had a black vomit, hinny ?" he asked softly, discovering in himself, in order to ask her the question, the voice of a young awkward lover.

Mrs. James had lost all touch with her body. It suffered, and she waited with perfect simplicity for its sufferings to cease. She did not care to speak while all this was going on. She shut her eyes and waited confidently for the moment in which she would be able, without disturbing anyone or putting herself forward, to tell them what she had been thinking. When she opened her eyes she saw her husband's face near her own. This was the moment to warn him in a whisper that she was dying. He spoke first.

"Art'a going now, hinny ?" he said. She could detect in his voice none of the surprise or reproach she had expected.

"Yes. Lift me up." She went so quickly that he had no time.

When the doctor came he turned Mary out of the room. "I'll deal with you next," he said contemptuously.

Either, she said to herself, wearily, as she went, he was convinced that she would get out of hand if he spoke to her civilly, or he had a grudge against the English. He was a Dane, a big creature, with thick arched nostrils and sharp eyes.

She went into Mrs. Sanderson's little sitting-room and lit the lamp. As she bent over it the shadows at the far side of the room thickened into the figure of a man lying in a chair. She felt a shock of pure terror. A moment later she supposed that Charles Sanderson had come—as

well he might, she thought indignantly—to ask after Mrs. James. Like all people who have no fear of infectious illness, she despised those others who have. She held the lamp up until it threw its light on the face of the sleeping man : it was Hugh. The lamp shook in her hand, stencilling a fantastic pattern of yellow circles on the wall behind his head. As she put it down she saw that his eyes were fixed on her in the cold stare of a man neither asleep nor awake, in that moment between the two when the sleeping self has vanished and the other is not yet reunited with him. Then she saw re-enter them the flicker of recognition, the only thing except the bodily touch and keener than it, which assures each of us that we are not alone in the world, that we exist in minds outside our own. She was afraid. It had been so long coming.

She steadied the lamp, and walked away from him as far as the door. " You shouldn't be here," she said. " Didn't that ridiculous foreigner tell you ? You must go away before anyone sees you. You'll be kept here in quarantine."

" I had a message from him," Hugh said yawning. " I've been here most of the day."

Mary tried to control her voice. " Please go now, Hugh darling. Don't come through the house. Open the window and go out that way."

His smile woke in her a forgotten sense of his dependence on her, as on those nights in Mark Henry Garton's house when he had fallen asleep in her arms. In those years she had loved him less for any of the qualities she most admired in him, his wit, his elegance, his sweet spirit, than for an ingenuous and appealing charm she found in him, something childish, that touched her soul. She was distracted by fear and longing.

" I thought the Sandersons would want to know about Mrs. James," he said, " and so I went there to tell them. They're living in a house belonging to one of the clerks. I spoke to Sanderson through a window. Elsie came into

the room when I was talking to him : he turned round and said to her : ' You'll be sorry that Mrs. James is dead, my darling.' My darling turned paler than ever and sat down on the floor. ' Oh no, she's not,' she said : ' I don't believe it. It's just a tale—like one of those birds mother's always talking about.' Like a fool, Sanderson persisted. The child got up, looking at him as if she really detested him. ' Nonsense,' she said, ' don't expect me to believe your lies any more, I'm too old.' She chose a toy with immense care and sauntered out, humming. That ass Sanderson was shocked. He seemed to think she ought to have wept. I hope you haven't been crying, my dear."

" I haven't had time," Mary said. She waved him off. " Don't come near me, Hugh. I might have the fever in my clothes."

Hugh looked at her reproachfully. " I feel ill," he said.

" Where do you feel ill ? " she asked : it is the question we put to a sick child, who can never answer it and goes on repeating : " It hurts me."

" My head hurts."

" How ? "

" It hurts," Hugh repeated.

She hesitated in the doorway, divided between the fear of touching him and the fear of leaving him even for a moment. The Danish doctor, who walked about like a cat, without a sound, appeared behind her in the darkness of the tiny hall. She pointed to Hugh.

" Hadn't you better take him away ? " she said coldly.

The doctor looked at him, moving the lamp so that the circle of light travelled across the table, a flat, yellow disc, reflected more softly on the ceiling.

" He might as well stay now."

" Because of the quarantine ? "

" Because of the fever."

" He hasn't got fever," Mary said quietly. She hoped that by denying it, it would cease to be true.

The doctor did not answer. With a gentleness all the more marked because of his incivility to herself, he began to help Hugh upstairs. She followed him with the lamp. From stair to stair, behind the clasped figures of the two men, so slowly that she placed one foot on the stair and brought the other up to it before moving to the next, she followed ; the circle of light moved with her, bent, by having to squeeze itself into the narrow well of the staircase, in such a way that two segments of yellow light accompanied her up the stairs, one on either wall.

The doctor turned into Mrs. Sanderson's bedroom, opposite the one where Mrs. James still lay. On every hand were signs of Mrs. Sanderson's hurried flight from the house. A cupboard door swung open, revealing dresses tossed together in a reckless heap, the bed was unmade, its pillows marked by the light pressure of her head. On the dressing-table, forgotten in her terror, were the things she would assuredly regret most, when she came to herself and began to look for them—a glass jar of rouge, a powder puff and two hair brushes, so worn and shabby that Mary looked away from them at once. She could imagine what the other woman would have felt in seeing her poverty exposed. The doctor swept them together between his hands and threw them into the bottom of the cupboard. Mary winced at the sound of broken glass. His contempt made them seem only so much the more pitiful and inadequate. She set the lamp on a shelf and bent over the bed.

" Hugh," she said gently. He looked at her with a peculiar knitting of his brows. He did not know her. How can he have altered so quickly ? she thought, dismayed.

" What shall I do first ? " she asked quietly.

" Can you undress him ? Say if you can't and I'll do it myself."

She began at once to take off his clothes. When he was undressed she looked for and found a cotton jacket

belonging to Charles Sanderson and put it on him. He lay in a kind of rigor that passed suddenly into a flush of heat. His body began to be wrenched by sickness. It was a dreadful form of torture ; after each spasm he lay as if he were partly disintegrated. The big cat-like doctor worked over him, rubbing his spine and the lower half of his slight body, his face glistening with sweat. Drops of it rolled down on to Hugh's back. This distressed Mary, and she would have liked to wipe them away. The doctor worked on, gentleness itself with Hugh, his big hands lifting and turning the sick man like a mother trying to ease her child, and increasingly cold and brutal in his manner to Hugh's wife. When her sleeve brushed against his bare arm he drew back with an air of annoyance, as if even her dress were distasteful to him.

Towards morning the nurse he had sent for came. At the same moment a grumbling sanitary squad arrived, sent by the authorities to get Mrs. James's body out of the way as quickly as possible. Mary went down into the hall when they were ready to go, and held the door open for them. They walked easily, having only Mrs. James's light weight to bear them down. Captain James went with them, perplexed and anxious. This hurried burying was too much for him : he could not have done with it in his mind. He turned it over and over, unable to understand what was happening to her. He was distressed by the thought of leaving her here among these foreigners whom she had never liked nor understood. This thought was to fill his mind during the long weeks at sea. He sat in his cabin, half attentive to the faint jingling of curtain rings on the rod above their bed, and asked himself what she would think on the last day, and before he could get to her, when she woke and found herself in Vera Cruz, with no one she knew or could understand : he pictured her wandering round, as she had always wandered from street to street in a strange town, looking in every window for the magic sign : English Spoken Here. He was never

able to forget the way she had been hurried out of sight. It seemed to him he had deserted her. She who so hated foreigners—to have left her with them.

Mary went back into Hugh's room. He was lying still. He had changed during the short time she had waited downstairs. In his livid face, covered with a film of sweat, the eyes protruding and blind, it was difficult to find any trace of Hugh. His hands, folded over the edge of the blanket, were unchanged, and at the sight of them, as when she had come across a glove or a coat of his after he ran away from her with Fanny Jardine, she felt a shocking pang. The nurse was pouring something between his lips. Part of it ran over his chin. "Tch!" the doctor said crossly. "Give him to me, you clumsy creature." He supported Hugh's head on one hand and gently, as if he had an infinite patience, gave him the rest of the draught.

He behaved as if Hugh were his son. For three days he hardly left him. The nurse during the day, and Mary at night, were his subordinates in the fight he was making to save Hugh. He was as tender as a woman, except to the two women. The nurse, a German speaking little English, managed to convey to Mary that he was always the same; the tones of a woman's voice, the sight of her face, irritated him past civility. "He says there are too many women in the world—it is not worth saving a sick one." He put up with women only as far as he could use them and could find nothing else to use in their place.

Mary did not care how brutally he behaved to her. The surprising gentleness and patience he discovered for Hugh excused him in her eyes for anything he chose to say or to be. She tried to avoid touching him when she helped him—more for his own sake than because she was humiliated by feeling him start aside, like a badly broken and touchy horse, from the pressure of her arm on his. His dislike seemed physical, but it was expressed as much

by the contempt he had for her intelligence, or what passed for intelligence in a woman, as by the jerk of his big powerful body when she came too close. The gratitude she felt towards him made her both sensitive and tolerant. She spared him as much as she could, by keeping quiet and by an impersonal manner.

She began to feel that she had lived in this room all her life. She would never forget it. Opening her eyes in the darkness of her bedroom at home, she would find herself, even without having willed to be there, in this other small, shabby room. There was the iron bedstead between the window and the big cupboard : facing it, the muslin-covered dressing-table, and the door in the corner. She knew it intimately. She knew which boards creaked and could avoid them in the dark. In one wall there was a long winding crack, which to herself she called the Amazon : she knew its turns and angles as if it were really a river, by the side of which she had walked.

She had not the least doubt that Hugh would recover. She held his poor racked body between her hands and felt her strength flow into him from them, as if she were the only person who could save him and was saving him. Her vitality seemed inexhaustible. On the fourth day the doctor's manner to her showed a faint reflection of his gentleness with Hugh. He even went so far as to explain to her that in the fatal course of the fever there are two stages, divided by a period of eight to twenty hours. During this period, as if a miracle had arrested its deadly flow, most of the symptoms disappear. Like a man dragged out of the water in the nick of time, the patient lies quietly, getting his breath. Sometimes from this point he creeps back to health. More often he passes from it into the second, final stage.

When the crisis came she was afraid. For the first time the thought crossed her mind that she might, after all, find herself cheated. She was no longer sure, as she had been sure.

The thought that Hugh might die frightened her. His death would leave her stranded in a world in which everyone else was indifferent to her. She would be left, in an isolation worse than that of the grave, because she would be able to feel and think. Hugh was the only person in the world who knew her. He knew everything about her, the mean and unkind things as well as the good. It was to him she belonged in the intimacy of marriage. He was the only person in whom she was safe and at home. She had been hurt and betrayed by him, she had failed him, turned from him, and yet he only was with her in those depths where each of us is as defenceless as the day we are born, the depths where we are ourselves and not the persons we would like to be. Without him she would be friendless. She would be alone.

Hugh lay still. He was conscious of his body, of the touch of the sheet, of a light not far from him. He shut his eyes in order not to see it. At once he descended in darkness to an immense depth, between walls of darkness, of which he was vaguely conscious though he did not try to touch them. And as if it had been waiting for him there, a phrase—*the turn of the lands*—began to press itself on his inner ear. It died away, and recurred, in an irregular rhyme. It began to worry him. He could not get rid of it, nor could he understand it. Where were these lands? *The Turn of the Lands.* A faint, delicious coolness was associated with the words. Wearily his mind groped and groped in the darkness.

Suddenly the walls receded and he rode out, in the cool morning air, through the bustle of Newmarket. He passed the lines of sheeted horses at their work on the heath, and the familiar landmarks, and then he saw that he had come to the Turn of the Lands.

He gave a light fluttering sigh of pleasure.

Mary stooped over him. His face, purged of the years, had become that of the child he had been. The big Dane came in and looked at him. His eyes gleamed.

Forgetting that Mary was a woman, he glanced at her and smiled.

Hugh was eight weeks recovering a part of his strength. When he was able to sit up, Mary left him alone, during the day, with the nurse. She felt that he preferred to be left, not to have to make an effort to appear sensible and alive. It must take a long time, she thought, after such an illness, for a man to knit himself into a presentable whole. A subtle sense warned her that if she wanted to re-establish herself in Hugh's life she must keep out of his way now. During the day she slept, wrote letters, and sat in the window of her room. Charles Sanderson came every morning at eight o'clock, and stood below the window. He brought her letters, told her the news, and wrote letters for her to England. She had forbidden him, in a message she sent him at the beginning of Hugh's illness, to tell Richard anything about it. "I beg," the message ran, "that if you have occasion to write to our agent at New Orleans or at Charleston you will not inform them of Mr. Hervey's illness. I do not wish Mr. Roxby to be disturbed." She told herself that she did not want Richard to come rushing back into danger. No doubt it was true. But another impulse was at work in her—the same impulse that made her add to her letter to Clara: "I do not wish you to tell Sylvia of her father's illness." These two of her children had, of their own will, cut the cable: she bore them no grudge, but she would not allow them to have any part in her troubles. They had made their choice and gone—let them go.

The *Mark Henry*, with Mrs. Sanderson and Elsie on board, left Vera Cruz for Liverpool as soon as her master was out of quarantine. Mary spoke to Captain James once, from the window, before he left. His face wore the same air of surprise and bewilderment it had worn when she saw him following Mrs. James out of the house. When she said good-bye he stood quietly in front of her for a moment, looking at her, as he looked at a ship which

had signalled that she was going to speak him at sea—as if he could not imagine what she wanted, but was prepared to listen.

"Well, good-bye, captain," she repeated.

He started. "Good-bye, ma'am. There's something. Mrs. James would be agreeable to joining me in this—I'm grateful to you for what you did, ma'am. In a manner of speaking, I feel it."

He saluted her and marched away, moving slowly and carefully, as if he were not sure of his position. When, nearly two months later, she was leaving Vera Cruz, the agent handed her, sewn up in sailcloth, Mrs. James's Household Book, which Captain James had brought on shore the night before he sailed and left at the office, to be given her "with Mrs. James's respectful compliments."

She opened it at the first page and saw that Mrs. James had begun it the day she married, with a recipe for A Shakeing Pouding. In its different coloured inks, and in the strange forms assumed, at the bidding of her gentle pen, by the most familiar words, Mary might, if she had had the key, have discovered the whole story of Mrs. James's life, pressed between its buckram covers like the flowers that slipped out from its pages as she turned them. She was pleased that it had been given to her.

For a long time after Hugh began to get stronger she still sat up with him at night. He slept lightly, with intervals of wakefulness, when he lay without talking, his eyes placid and empty, gathering in the things nearest him, the iron bed-rail, to which a few flecks of green paint still clung, the brass foot of the lamp, a corner of the window through which, since it faced west, he saw let down every evening a sheet of pure rose colour and in the morning a strange reflected light, like a mirage of water, with a rampart of clouds like hills, behind. Mary watched him from a chair set facing the bed with its back to this window. His weakness brought nearer the surface that childlike quality she discerned in him, a simplicity, gentle and

appealing, that hurt her. She wanted to know that he relied on her, and to look after him.

One night he had fallen asleep early. He woke about one o'clock with a fearful cry. She hurried to touch him and soothe him. "What was it, Hugh? Were you dreaming?" But he had no memory of the dream that had made him cry out. He looked at her with a faint, mischievous smile. "Stay with me, Mary."

"I am staying with you, my darling," she said softly. "I've been here all the time."

Hugh sighed. "I meant beside me."

"Do you want me to hold you?" she said doubtfully. "Can I? Would it be good for you?"

A flicker of his familiar sharp humour crossed his eyes. "You're always so careful, my dear. Perhaps you think I'm not dead enough?"

"I didn't want to do the wrong thing," Mary said humbly. She lay down on the bed. Hugh turned with a sigh of relief and settled his back against her. "That's right," he said, in a satisfied voice: "Are you comfortable?" He did not care whether she were or not. All he cared about was that she should let him go to sleep against her. He gave himself up to her in a complete abandon. His shoulders, his back, his legs, all his body, were for her. He moved only to settle more easily into her thin curves. In a few moments he was asleep.

The next day he sent the nurse for her. When she came he told the nurse to go away. "Go away and sleep. You look yellow," he said easily. She went, and he looked at Mary with bright eyes.

"I want to get away from here," he said. "When can we go? Will you ask Hamlet in the morning?"

"Hamlet? Oh—yes. You'd better ask him yourself. He doesn't care for women."

"He told me yesterday you were very intelligent."

"Well, I'll keep my character," Mary said, sur-

prised, " by asking him no questions. You can talk to him."

" Oh very well." A faint excitement showed in his face, reminding her of a young mercurial Hugh, for whom everything that happened was exciting. He had schooled that mercurial creature out of existence since those days. " I lie here and think of all the things I want to do and the places I've never seen. Do you realise we've never seen Vienna—or Rome ? The first thing you do, when we get home—oh, home, Mary—is to arrange to take six months off at once. After that we'll do it every year. I've let you run our life your own way too long. It's a poor enough way."

" Six months ! " Mary said, dismayed.

" Not a day less. You needn't take them at a bite." He looked at her sweetly. " You'll let me corrupt you, won't you, Mary ? Why, I hardly know you."

" We can be better friends," Mary stammered.

" Friends ! " Hugh said drowsily. A fine ironical smile gleamed in his eyes. " I don't want a friend. I want you in my arms. I want to make love to you again." He closed his eyes and lay half asleep, still and withdrawn.

Mary felt her spirit leap in her body. Her body had become that of a girl. The moment in which Hugh would take her again assumed a sudden overwhelming importance in her mind. She felt for a moment that to be used by Hugh was the most important thing that would ever happen to her. Yet its significance was not physical. Its significance was the deep exquisite pleasure of surrender, of knowing herself the source of pleasure, of being used. Apart from that it had no significance, no importance. The ecstasy it offered was no different and no sharper than that she had felt in the moment of launching the beautiful *Peerless*, or the moment in which she had stood waist-deep in icy screaming water, one in a line of men and women trying dangerously to drag a half-drowned

man into safety. The thrill to be had from beauty or danger and the thrill of surrender to Hugh were one and the same—the last was the least important, except at the moment. At the moment it took complete possession, the body taking possession of its old enemy the spirit, rewarding it for its brief surrender with a marvellous sense of lightness and release, and afterwards withdrawing from its Pyrrhic victory, content. At the moment it was the only important thing in one's life—but only at the moment and for a moment.

She looked at Hugh, who seemed to have fallen asleep. Her thoughts and her desires lapsed into a tide of feeling which swept everything before it. She went over to him and laid her hand gently on his shoulder. Her spirit left her and went out to his like one of her ships leaving harbour. He opened his eyes and looked at her placidly. He was sure of her and quite happy.

"Would you like a drink of tea?" She had found in a cupboard in the sitting-room the gaily-coloured tin of Ceylon tea Mrs. James had brought out with her for Mrs. Sanderson. She had had no scruples about opening it. She took some from it for Hugh now. That he could hold the cup she gave him seemed to her little short of a miracle. She watched him curl his fingers round it with the same delight in his exquisite skill that his mother had felt as she watched him close his small fingers round one of her own. Tears came into her eyes.

"What's the matter?" Hugh asked.

"That cup. You're holding it."

"Well—and if I am!" he said, surprised.

The doctor came into the room with his soft, springing tread. Mary half expected him to arch his back at her. He looked at Hugh and said: "Well, sir?"

"When can I go home?" Hugh asked.

An air of sadness came over the older man's face. For a moment Mary felt sorry for him: she realised, without surprise, that he loved Hugh and could not bear the

thought of losing him. She had the temerity to let her sympathy show in her face. He glanced at her furiously and turned his back to speak to Hugh.

"You're in a hurry to leave us?" he said gently.

"I don't care much to leave you, sir. This is no place for a gentleman, still less for a doctor as good as you are. Why not come with us? I'll run up and down London talking about you."

He saw a strange gleam—of suspicion or longing?—in the man's eyes. "Do come, sir," he said ingenuously. At that moment the thought crossed his mind that the Dane might be hiding himself out here.

"You're too kind." There was certainly irony in the smooth voice. "But I prefer this country. Yes—strange as you may think it—I am happier in Vera Cruz than I should be in England."

Hugh looked at him frankly. "If you change your mind, don't forget my offer," he murmured.

"I shan't change," the other said softly, "and I shall not forget you." He added a sentence in his own tongue, which Hugh did not ask him to translate. Like Mary, he felt the man's profound inner melancholy, but he did not attribute it to the same cause, which was indeed only an immediate grief imposed on one so old and deep-seated that it was responsible for every line on his broad face and for almost every gesture of his body and tone of his voice.

On the day when Hugh walked three times across the floor of his room Sanderson told Mary that a small Danesacre steamer, the *Ann Harking*, which had been trading between New York and the Plate for four years, was calling at Vera Cruz on her way home to be overhauled. He thought Mary might have letters for her. When she told Hugh, he was seized with the desire to go home on her. No more comfortable boat would do as well: the *Ann Harking* was going to Danesacre and he wanted nothing so much as to return there with her. Mary did

not argue with him. She asked the agent to arrange with the *Ann Harking's* owners, and on January 3rd she stood beside Hugh and watched Vera Cruz sink out of sight. It was already becoming for her what we call a memory—yet one so sharp, so vivid, that nothing in her life was ever closer to her or more immediate. She had only to close her eyes to see, in every detail as it was, Mrs. Sanderson's bedroom, and the face of the Danish doctor was as real to her, until the day she came to die, as the faces of her children and her friends. It is true that we remember best the places where we have been unhappy ; happiness acts on our memory like the acid used by an etcher on his steel plate : it removes everything but the image of itself.

They had a quiet voyage of it. The weather grew cold, and Hugh's strength returned. They passed Flamborough Head in the early morning. At two in the afternoon they had their first sight of Danesacre old church on the cliff, bearing west north-west at a distance of four miles. The January day was drawing to its end when the *Ann Harking* made fast at the old Garton wharf. A grey sky, clearing up the valley, folded down on the upper harbour. The water was dove-grey and ruffled like the breast of a bird when the wind blows its feathers across. A light cold wind blew round them the whole time.

They were to spend a night or two in Mark Henry Garton's house. It belonged now to the man who had bought the Yard from her. He made them welcome and gave them Mark Henry's old room, in which she and Hugh had slept when they came home here from London and before Hugh left her. A fire leaped in the grate and the curtains were drawn over the wide window. When she drew them back she saw that the lights were coming out in the town ; they were sprinkled thick round the harbour and on the streets running across the face of the cliff : a few scattered lights trailed away into the blackness of the valley. She tried to make out a light in Sylvia's

house, but it seemed to be in darkness. Below, in the Yard, a boy was whistling *White wings they never grow weary.*

Mempes came over to see them in the morning. He had had a severe attack of gout the week before and ought not to have been out. The journey was a cold one, the wind sharp, the day cloudy and dark. Mary saw that he could hardly breathe. He talked to her for an hour, and she persuaded him to lie on the couch. Hugh came down and was shocked by his look. They persuaded him to stay, and he was willing enough to have a bed made up for him in the room that had been Mark Henry Garton's office and Mary's after him. It was little used now and half empty, so that he found plenty of room in it for Mark Henry's tulipwood table and even for Mark Henry. But for the most part he lay listening to the sounds floating up from the Yard. He made no trouble of dying. He gave in at once, glad to have done. What use was his life to him in an age which denied all he knew? He had never been at ease, among people thinking of their piety, and their progress, and of making the empire pay twenty per cent. Once when Mary asked him how he felt he said with a surprised, courteous air: "I'm going, Mary," and in a stronger voice, reverting for a moment to the natural speech of a much younger John Mempes: "Damme if I ain't."

Mary would not believe it. How could she, when she saw him lying there day after day, unchanged except for the trouble he had in breathing, his face as grim as hell, his eyes placid. His mind was a swept room. He remembered none of the women he had loved—except, perhaps, Mary Roxby. He remembered best the clear, soft line where sky becomes sea and sea sky, and the ships going north and south at all times of the year, and the shape of the land jutting out into the sea, and the sea, and ships.

He lay quiet, except when he could hardly breathe, for

almost five days and then passed into a stupor. The Yard was launching an iron steamer that day. There were flags everywhere, and the Yard full of people. The sun came out for a moment as she took the water. Men shouted, boys ran up and down, everyone was excited and laughing in spite of the cold—it was a splendid launch.

Mary heard it all as she knelt beside Mempes. She had been kneeling there for an hour, her thoughts scattered. She had been so sure that this was one of his attacks, perhaps a little worse than the others, that she was stunned by the quick end. Part of her own life ended here. There was no one now for whom she had been a little girl : she remembered the early morning when her mother whisked her off to London from this house, the still air, the cool wind, the carriage with two horses waiting in Harbour Street, and young Mr. Mempes, his dress as dandified as if Harbour Street were Pall Mall, his face grave, his voice light and kind. Then she had been glad to leave him behind. She had come more than half her journey since then and there were tears in her eyes.

Hugh spoke to her. " Is he dead ? " she asked incredulously. She could hardly believe it, when she saw the flags straining from the wind, the stocks empty, and the people trooping out of the Yard to drink their glasses of punch and burgundy. The water in the harbour was grey and ribbed, like an old shore. A boy in a crimson jersey hurried out of the Yard, singing to himself at the top of his voice, his arms full of pieces of wood. She turned to Hugh, with the idea of making him promise not to leave her.

Also by
Storm Jameson

THE LOVELY SHIP

in which the story of Mary Hansyke Hervey begins

